PORTRAIT OF A SOUTHERN PROGRESSIVE: THE POLITICAL LIFE AND TIMES
OF GOVERNOR PAT M. NEFF OF TEXAS, 1871-1952

Mark Stanley, B.S., M.A.

Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2011

APPROVED:

Richard B. McCaslin, Major Professor and
Chair of the Department of History
Elizabeth Hayes Turner, Committee Member
Roberto Calderón, Committee Member
Aaron Navarro, Committee Member
John Todd, Committee Member
James D. Meernik, Acting Dean of the
Toulouse Graduate School
Pat M. Neff was a product of his political place and time. Born in Texas in 1871, during Reconstruction, he matured and prospered while his native state did the same as it transitioned from Old South to New South. Neff spent most of his life in Waco, a town that combined New South Progressivism with religious conservatism. This duality was reflected in Neff’s own personality. On moral or religious issues, he was conservative. On economic and social issues, he was Progressive. He thus was a typical Southern Progressive who de-emphasized social and political change in favor of economic development. For instance, as governor from 1921 to 1925, his work to develop and conserve Texas’ water resources brought urbanization and industrialization that made the New South a reality in the state.

Neff was a devout Baptist which influenced his politics and philosophy. He was president of Baylor University, a Baptist institution, for fifteen years after leaving the governor’s office and he led the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in the 1940s. He combined Progressive and Christian values as he argued for the establishment of the United Nations and advocated forgiveness and brotherhood after World War II. The war’s end marked the beginning of the American civil rights movement. Many within the SBC advocated an end to racism and discrimination, others did not. Neff’s unwillingness to challenge racial traditions was typical of southern Progressives.

The convergence of national politics and southern evangelical religion is evident in the final chapter of Neff’s career. His selection of President Harry S. Truman as the recipient of an honorary doctorate from Baylor offended many religious conservatives. Neff overcame the opposition but it damaged his reputation and ultimately forced his resignation, ending his public career. By the time of his death in 1952, Texas had become everything the New South was supposed to be—urbanized and industrialized. Neff’s activities were crucial to making that happen.
Copyright 2011

by

Mark Stanley
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I wish to thank the members of my committee who have given me the training and knowledge necessary to complete this dissertation. Richard McCaslin, Elizabeth Hayes-Turner, Roberto Calderón, and Aaron Navarro have never failed to offer useful insight and advice. Special thanks go to Randolph B. “Mike” Campbell who first suggested this topic and directed my Master’s Thesis. I would never have had the broad understanding of Texas history and politics without the benefit of his work and influence.

None of this would have been possible without the support of others. Dr. Tom Wagy, of Texas A&M-Texarkana, my alma mater, has been both an inspiration and source of support of long-standing. I especially wish to thank my friend and colleague, Jessica Brannon-Wranosky who has spent many hours discussing nearly every aspect of this project. She has been truly invaluable. I also wish to express my thanks to the University of North Texas’ College of Arts and Sciences, Richard B. Toulouse Graduate School, and Department of History, as well as the Hatton W. Sumners Foundation for their generous financial support. No biography of Pat M. Neff is possible without the cooperation of Baylor University. I wish to thank its administration for access to official records. Ellen Kuniyuki Brown, and all of the personnel of Baylor’s Texas Collection were wonderful. There are many others too numerous to thank directly.

My parents, Lewis and Karen, and my siblings James, and Catherine have been supportive and visibly proud—thanks. I hope this accomplishment is an inspiration to my nieces Casey Durham and Madison Stanley and my nephew Tyler Durham. Yes, you too have tremendous capability and potential—please use it well.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION: HISTORIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. THE PROGRESSIVISM OF PAT NEFF</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. TEXAS IN THE 1890s: A POLITICAL PLACE AND TIME</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. NEFF AS THE SPEAKER OF THE TEXAS HOUSE</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. PROGRESSIVES, PROHIBITIONISTS, AND THE GOVERNOR’S MANSION</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. VOX POPULI, VOX DEI: NEFF’S ELECTION—1920</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. AN OMINOUS BEGINNING—1921</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. KEEPING THE LID ON—1922</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. TOWARD A MORE PROGRESSIVE AGENDA—1923</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. A LAST HURRAH—1924</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. A SOUTHERN PROGRESSIVE IN THE POST-PROGRESSIVE ERA</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. EDUCATION: SAVING AND BUILDING BAYLOR</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. OLD PROGRESSIVES NEVER DIE</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: HISTORIOGRAPHY

Pat M. Neff was born in Coryell County, Texas, in 1871 and died in Waco, the county seat of neighboring McLennan County, in 1952. Historically, Neff’s life spanned the period of time between Texas’ redemption from Republican Party rule following Reconstruction to the beginning of the “Republican revolution” that marked a significant change in southern and national politics. Neff, a politically engaged individual, was either directly involved in or very near some of the most important events during Texas’ transformation from the Old South to the New South. During the course of his political career he served as a state legislator, Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives, assistant county and county attorney, governor of Texas, and Texas Railroad Commissioner, as well as a member of the United States Board of Mediation. Neff was politically active almost continually between 1898 and 1932 at which time he assumed the presidency of Baylor University in Waco. Ideologically, Neff was a typical southern Progressive. Politically he was a Democrat—mostly Progressive but occasionally conservative. In many ways, his political life is a commentary on the fluidity and change of Texas and southern politics during the formative years of the New South.1

In The Mind of the South, Wilbur J. Cash identifies some important factors in bringing about the transition from Old South to New South. Among the most important are the “factory” and the “school.” Cash asserted that the “factory,” or industrialization, would make the South “rich” and that education in turn would “train” southern leaders how to “take advantage of the opportunities afforded” by industrialization. Neff is an example of a young man who took advantage of educational opportunity to become a leader of his state. Furthermore, Neff, like

---

Cash, understood the importance of these factors in raising the South and made them a major focus. Neff’s work for the cause of water conservation played a major role in Texas’ industrialization. During his tenure at Baylor, Neff sought to extend educational opportunity to economically disadvantaged students. Neff and Cash had similar visions of what the New South should be; Neff spent a major portion of his life bringing it about in Texas.²

By contemporary standards, Neff would probably be considered a very “down-to-earth” man. He had a strong connection to the land and never strayed far from the farm on which he was born. As an attorney and public official, Neff had a deep respect for the law and its enforcement. Most importantly, Neff, a devout Baptist, saw service to God in particular and society in general as a Christian obligation. These are the issues that drove the man and are the main themes of the recent biography entitled *The Land, the Law and the Lord: The Life of Pat M. Neff, Governor of Texas 1921-1925* by Dorothy Blodgett et al. This work offers a significant basis for further research by providing a framework of the particulars of the governor’s life and career. Nevertheless, Neff’s participation in or close proximity to important events in the development of the New South in Texas offer the opportunity for greater analysis. For the purposes of this dissertation, Neff is used as a case study of political trends and events during his lifetime—from Redemption to the beginning of the Republican revolution.³

When Neff was born in 1871, Texas was at a crossroads of change. According to Patrick Williams, author of *Beyond Redemption: Texas Democrats after Reconstruction*, the state was quickly losing its frontier character as new settlers poured in from the east. Meanwhile, the threat from hostile Native Americans finally came to an end with the defeat of the Comanche,

---

Kiowa, and Cheyenne at Palo Duro Canyon in 1874. Texas’ “Redemption,” or the resumption of power by conservative Democrats beginning in 1872, also ended Reconstruction thus drawing a close to the state’s experiment with Republican reform, thus reinforcing its ties to its Old South past. According to Williams, the circumstances of Texas’ Redemption differed from other southern states and to a large extent helped shape its later political landscape. Corruption under the administration of Reconstruction-era Governor Edmund J. Davis led to increasing opposition even among Republicans. The result was the Republicans’ loss of control of the state legislature in 1872 followed by the defeat of Davis by democrat Richard Coke in the gubernatorial election of 1874. Texas Redeemers faced issues that other southern leaders did not, such as having a frontier and having an ethnically diverse population. Texans, be they rich or poor, planters or yeoman farmers, old settlers or new frontiersman—they all had varying opinions and needs that presented challenges to the state’s politicians. In fact, they agreed on little but the need for low property taxes and railroad construction. According to Williams, this created a political landscape within the Texas Democratic Party of “shifting” rather than “enduring” alliances of political factions that frequently fractured, split, or realigned. This was the political state Neff was born to, and it was the one he operated in during his adult life.4

In such an environment, defining the New South and redefining Texas became a major, and often contentious, goal for political and economic leaders. In C. Vann Woodward’s *Origins of the New South*, the author notes that the “New South” does not indicate a place or period but instead, “a slogan, a rallying cry.” But, while many took up the cry, others rejected it. Woodward calls the emergence of the idea of the “Old South” one of the “most significant inventions” of the New South. This romanticized and mythologized view of the antebellum

---

4Patrick Williams, *Beyond Redemption: Texas Democrats after Reconstruction* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2007), 1-12.
South created an alternative view of the region and its history that was more palatable to its people and also reveals the extent to which many were reluctant to embrace the idea of a New South. Those that did take up the rallying cry faced opposition from conservatives. One of the few issues that southern conservatives and New South proponents could readily agree on was race. In a chapter entitled “Progressivism for Whites Only,” Woodward asserts that southern Progressivism was oriented toward white, urban, professionals and the upper middle class. More famously, Woodward noted that “Southern Progressivism was Progressive for whites only, and after the poll tax took its toll, not all the white men were included.” Race control, through Jim Crow segregation laws, and franchise restriction of both poor blacks and whites, insured that the ruling class would continue to do just that with a minimal of interference. It also insured that they could keep the debate over their competing views of the South to themselves. Neff, a practicing attorney and proponent of the poll tax, from the small but burgeoning city of Waco, readily fits Woodward’s profile of a southern Progressive.5

The leaders of the New South movement faced a monumental task. According to historian Don Doyle, the movement was led by a “new business class of merchants, financiers, industrialists, and their allies” from other professions. The greatest achievements of these “new men” were the creation of southern towns and cities and an entire new class of business leaders with a strong agenda of economic development. Meanwhile, southern women became increasingly influential. At the dawn of the New South era, women’s public involvement rarely extended beyond the church and community. By the 1880s, southern women joined various civic clubs that sought to build parks, improve schools, and beautify their communities. At the

5C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, 1966), ix, 155, 373; Dwight Billings, Planters and the Making of the New South: Class, Politics, and Development in North Carolina, 1865-1900 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Billings asserts that even after the Civil War, the planter class still held considerable wealth and wielded power. They formed the base of conservative politics until the turn of the century.
turn of the century, Galveston club women were instrumental in securing the town’s recovery from the 1900 Hurricane. As women’s influence in civic affairs became more prevalent, the natural progression was toward voting rights. Texas women played important roles in the national suffrage movement. Progressive leaders, both women and men, contributed to the overall growth and development of the New South.\(^6\)

Just as Neff is representative of the up and coming leadership of the New South, the city of Waco itself is an example of the urbanization and modernization of Texas. The town was first plotted in 1849 on the banks of the Brazos River; the next year it became the seat of the newly created McLennan County. By 1859, the town’s population was 749. The population reached 3,008 in 1870 and 7,295 in 1880. By 1900, the year Neff was elected to his second term in the legislature, the town was home to 20,686 residents, 163 factories, six banks, and Baylor University. It was the sixth largest city in the state. The city served as a local transportation hub as early as the 1880s when railroads such as the St. Louis and Southwestern and the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas linked industrious local cotton farmers to the national economy. Historian Edward Ayers, in his book *Southern Crossings: A History of the American South, 1877-1906*, notes that at the end of Civil War, the region was relatively devoid of sizable cities. Transportation hubs, such as Waco became the focal point of demographic and economic growth. Cities such as Waco drew people seeking a better life from outlying areas. The educational opportunity at Baylor initially drew Neff to Waco where he received a Bachelor’s Degree. Later upon graduation from University of Texas law school, the town’s prosperity

persuaded him to set up practice. Ayers also notes that politics during the period were “redefined by segregation, disfranchisement, the Populist revolt, and…Progressivism.” Such an atmosphere presented both “opportunities and constraints” to all—Neff included.7

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Texas politics reflected the turmoil of a time and place where sectional politics and “King Cotton” gave way to the urbanization, industrialization, and commercial agriculture that were requisite for the New South. According to Alwyn Barr in his work *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics 1876-1906*, Texans approached these changes as opportunities or problems depending on their economic or cultural interests.” Change itself became a political issue; as Texans moved away from Reconstruction and toward the twentieth century, calls for reform became more frequent. One of Texas’ earliest reformers was James S. Hogg who served as attorney general from 1887 to 1891 and governor from 1891 to 1895. Barr notes that Hogg “marked a new generation” of leadership that was “less bound by tradition.” During his career in public service, Hogg sought to increase education funding and limit corporations—like railroads. Hogg’s creation of the Texas Railroad Commission is considered the crowning achievement of his reform agenda, but it was also a response to demands of farmers dependent on the railroads to get their product to market.

Hogg’s refusal to appoint members of the Texas Farmers’ Alliance to the Commission resulted in a split between Alliance members and the Texas Democratic Party that led to the formation of the People’s Party of Texas. Neff was closely associated with Hogg; he attended law school with Hogg’s son, James Jr., and obtained the elder’s support in his successful run for Speaker of

---


6
the Texas House of Representatives. Neff was among the “new generation” of Democratic leaders who remained loyal to Hogg.⁸

For this new generation of leaders, the Populist Revolt that peaked in 1896 was a formative event. The revolt started in Texas and had wide ranging political repercussions in the state, region, and nation. This is the subject of Donna Barnes’ *Farmers in Rebellion: The Rise and Fall of the Southern Farmers’ Alliance and People’s Party in Texas*. In the fall of 1877, a group of farmers gathered in Lampasas, Texas to discuss what they could do to address problems such as debt peonage and declining cotton prices. The meeting marked the beginning of the Southern Farmers’ Alliance. In following years the organization became increasingly political until 1892 when it joined forces with the People’s Party, also known as the Populists. Many Texas farmers abandoned support of the Democratic Party in favor of the Populists. In the election of 1894, Populists elected twenty-two state representatives and two state senators. In the governor’s race that year, Democratic stalwart Charles Culberson won a narrow victory over Populist opponent Thomas Nugent with only 49 percent of the vote. Nugent defeated Culberson in fifty-nine counties. In 1896, the People’s Party made a critical error in pursuing the “fusion” candidacy of William Jennings Bryan for the presidency—Bryan was also the candidate of the opposing Democratic Party. Ultimately, the move destroyed the Populist party. Nevertheless, the party’s candidate for governor, Jerome Kearby, polled 44 percent of the electorate. This did not escape the notice of establishment Democrats, including Neff, who later sought to limit the Populist’s political threat through franchise restriction.⁹

---


With the failure of Populist efforts, their push for reform passed on to the Progressives. The term “Progressive” has historically defied description. Thus, it is important to ask a few pertinent questions—What is Progressivism? Are there different forms of Progressivism? More importantly, what groups constituted the Progressive forces in Texas and was Neff one of them? Historian Paul W. Glad has sought to answer some of these questions. Glad noted that in the 1920s, the term “Progressive” had no rigid definition. Glad cited the example of journalist William Hard who asked his readers the simple question “What is Progressivism?” Hard’s aim was to provide a clear definition of the term and to offer a means of comparison with “conservatism.” Hard found that people had difficulty answering his question. According to Glad, “Most of those who answered…believed that Progressivism rested upon certain fundamentals, whether derived from political theory, philosophy, ethics, or religion.” Furthermore, Glad noted that a majority of respondents believed that there was such a thing as Progressivism and that it differed fundamentally from the conservative culture of the time. So, while there was clear agreement that Progressivism existed, no one could quite define it. Glad also noted that the Progressive movement was “pluralistic.” Glad wrote, “The problems which aroused the Progressive conscience were broad social, political, and economic problems. Whatever may have been their difference in status and interest, Progressives wanted….to make the institutions of government more responsive to the need of all citizens.” He further noted Progressives believed that “the nation’s economy should serve the public interest. Programs and methods varied, but insofar as anyone shared in these broad aspirations, he was to that extent a Progressive.”

Populists there are a major underlying theme.

---

Glad’s main point was that the Progressive movement was a broad based reform movement comprised of many different social, political, and economic reform efforts. Not all Progressives embraced every single reform issue under the movement’s “big umbrella.” One of the better-known strains of Progressivism is “business Progressivism.” Devotees of this strain deemphasized the political and social aspects of Progressivism while emphasizing its economic aspects. Another strain of Progressivism is the “southern Progressive.” Generally, southern Progressives were business Progressives who, for obvious reasons, chose to deemphasize Progressivism’s more controversial issues such as labor and civil rights, in favor of business-oriented reforms such as economic development. Moreover, the latter was a main objective of the New South movement. Historian George B. Tindall noted that, “Any serious attempt to understand Southern politics [and southern Progressivism] in the twenties must begin with recognition that the Progressive urge of previous decades did not disappear but was transformed through an emphasis upon certain of its tendencies to the neglect of others.” By the 1920s, Progressive ideals were embedded in American political culture. In the conservative South, liberal politicians accentuated the business-oriented aspects of Progressivism while deemphasizing the social aspects of the philosophy out of political necessity. For example, proposing the overturn of “Jim Crow” was not politically viable, providing jobs was. Neff, like many politicians, spent political capital on issues that he thought he could win and avoided doing so on issues he might not.\footnote{George B. Tindall, “Business Progressivism: Southern Politics in the Twenties,” \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly}, 62 (Winter, 1963): 92-3.}

Tindall also offered what he called a “working definition” of Progressivism. According to him the Progressive spirit was based on five central tenets. First was the desire to bring government closer to the people; second was the desire for cheap, efficient government; third
was the regulation of corporations; fourth was a sense of social justice including labor laws and prohibition; finally, there was the desire for a responsive government that provided essential services such as the building of roads, support of education, and public health and welfare.

Tindall noted that in the 1920s government efficiency and public services were accentuated, while democracy, corporate regulation, and social justice were deemphasized. In many ways, Neff’s beliefs fit this description of Progressivism. Neff was often prone to taking his case to the people of Texas—he traveled extensively during his 1920 election campaign and his fight for an uninstructed delegation to the Democratic National Convention in 1924. Governor Neff was also concerned about fiscal responsibility and the need to increase revenues in order to provide expanded services. Neff was a life-long proponent of Progressive agendas such as public education, parks, and conservation of natural resources. For the better part of two decades, Neff was instrumental in efforts to develop state water resources for both public enjoyment and economic development. Thus, Neff’s political beliefs and agenda as governor were strongly Progressive—and typical of Southern Progressivism.12

When Neff entered Texas politics in 1898 he entered a fluid and competitive political environment. Migration from other states, as well as a much more diversified economy contributed greatly toward creating this environment as Texas moved rapidly toward the New South. Walter Buenger takes a microcosmic approach toward economic development of the South with *The Path to A Modern South: Northeast Texas Between Reconstruction and the Great Depression*. Buenger believes that historians have “underestimated the level, type, and consequences of change between 1887 and 1930.” Buenger also believes that Texas’ competitive political environment, along with factors such as a “more fluid society and culture”

12Ibid., 93-4.
allowed Texans to initiate greater change than elsewhere in the South during the same period. Just as this atmosphere was conducive to economic development, it was also conducive to political conflict. As Williams noted, Texas politics were born of shifting alliances and factions, Buenger identifies three specific factions: Conservatives, Reformers, and Insurgents. During much of Neff’s political career, especially early on, Texas Democratic Party politics were marked by power struggles between these factions. Neff was aligned with the reformers as evidenced by his association with Hogg, and later by his opposition to conservative Joseph Weldon Bailey in the 1920 governor’s race. As a state legislator, Neff played an instrumental role in limiting political insurgency through franchise restriction. Later, his defeat of Bailey marked an important victory for Texas reformers.  

One of the most useful works for understanding the state of Southern and Texas politics during Neff’s lifetime is V.O. Key’s *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. Key’s work is a treatise on regional politics from Redemption to the time of publication in 1949. Key, a political scientist, uses quantitative methods to reveal how one-party politics and race affect regional politics. According to Key, “Politics is the South’s number one problem.” A valuable aspect of Key’s work is that he offers a state-by-state analysis of politics at the time. Key agrees with Woodward, Buenger, and Williams on the factionalization of politics but adds several Texas-specific notes. Key believes that the state’s wealth contributed greatly to the factional conflict between conservatives and liberals and was exacerbated by disagreements over “what government ought, and ought not, do.” Thus, Texas’ relative wealth among Southern states hastened and exacerbated debates over the size and influence of state government. Such debates

---

13Walter L. Buenger, *The Path to A Modern South: Northeast Texas Between Reconstruction and the Great Depression*  (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), xv, 75; See also Edward L. Ayers', *Promise of a New South*, Ch. 17 “Populism” delves into the divisiveness of politics of the period. Buenger’s work is very similar to Edward Ayres’ *Promise of the New South*, focusing on the social, political, and especially economic development of Northeast Texas within the context of the New South.
contributed to the development of factions and insurgency. Texas Progressives sought to limit factionalization and insurgency through the poll tax and the so-called “White Primary.” Key credits the mandatory poll tax, which poor whites often did not pay, along with racial violence, which dissuaded blacks from voting, with reducing the electorate by more than half.14

Shortly thereafter, the Texas legislature passed the Terrell Election Laws of 1902. Ostensibly these were designed to regulate elections but also gave greater powers to county political parties to administer primary elections. This resulted in the creation of what became known as the “White Primary” in which whites excluded blacks from primary participation.

Historian Alwyn Barr in his work, *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics 1876-1906*, portrays the passage of the mandatory poll tax and the Terrell Election laws as a triumph for Texas Progressives. These laws enabled Progressives to be more effective at passing reforms such as the regulation of the banking and insurance industries and increasing educational funding. More important, through the passage of these laws, Progressives changed the face of the electorate and thus political discourse in Texas for years to come. Neff was a major proponent of the mandatory poll tax and was instrumental in the passage of the Terrell election laws.15

After serving in the state legislature, Neff withdrew from state politics and returned to Waco in 1905. For the next fifteen years, he spent his time either in private legal practice or in public service as assistant county attorney and county attorney. During this period, Neff like many of his Progressive contemporaries became increasingly interested in the prohibition issue. Lewis Gould describes how “dry, Progressive Democrats of Texas ultimately gained supremacy in the factional battles of the decade after 1911” in *Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democrats in the Wilson Era*. The prohibition issue resulted in an unlikely coalition of urban

---

Progressives and rural prohibitionists. Neff embodied Gould’s thesis in that he was an urbanite and a Progressive, but was also a staunch Baptist who disapproved of alcoholic beverages. Neff used his oratorical skills for the cause as he made speaking engagements all over the state in 1917 and 1918. The tour likely whetted Neff’s appetite for politics. After passage of the prohibition amendment in 1918, he returned to politics with his gubernatorial bid in 1920. That Democratic primary campaign was essentially a showdown between the conservative and Progressive wings of the Texas Democratic Party. Gould portrays it as a struggle between archconservative, former United States Senator Joseph Weldon Bailey and a slate of “prohibitionists.” According to Gould, Bailey’s defeat represented a “last stand of Texas conservatism of the old-style.” By 1921, Progressive victories on the issues of prohibition and woman suffrage, as well as the defeat of Bailey, cast Texas Progressives as the leading faction in state politics. Neff was a leader among Texas Progressives in achieving many of these goals.\textsuperscript{16}

At about the same time, race relations became increasingly violent. The “Waco Horror” of 1916 was an influential event for Neff. Patricia Bernstein’s \textit{The First Waco Horror: The Lynching of Jesse Washington and the Rise of the NAACP} reveals how W.E.B. Dubois and the leadership of the NAACP focused the nation’s attention on the gruesome lynching of Jesse Washington, and in the process, strengthened the NAACP. In this incident, Washington, a seventeen year old African-American male was accused of murdering Lucy Fry, a forty-four year old farm woman. Washington was tried and found guilty of murder and immediately lynched by a mob that took him from the court room. The NAACP publicized the incident and published photos of Washington’s hanged and charred body in its official newspaper, the \textit{Crisis}. The event that became a scar on the city’s history happened near Neff’s law office just a short time after he

completed his tenure as county attorney. Afterwards, Neff carried with him a dislike for mob violence that influenced his policies as governor especially when it threatened his home city.17

When Neff entered the governor’s mansion in January 1921, he found the state rife with political and social tumult. Though his Progressive wing of the state Democratic Party had seemingly gained the upper hand in politics, conservative forces became increasingly vocal—even violent. Race relations deteriorated even further. Labor sought to maintain gains made during the First World War against the conservative business culture that came to be in the age of “normalcy.” Norman D. Brown’s Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug: Texas Politics, 1921-1928, is the foremost work on Texas politics in the 1920s. According to Brown, state politics were driven by three main factors: The Ku Klux Klan symbolized by the hood, “Fergusonism” symbolized by Miriam W. “Ma” Ferguson’s bonnet, and prohibition symbolized by the little brown jug. These three factors represent the main forces of conservative politics in the state at the time. Brown includes two chapters directly related to Neff’s governorship. The first entitled “Pat M. Neff, Apostle of Law Enforcement” deals mostly with Neff’s first election campaign and term of office. The second entitled “Pat Neff and the Battles of Peace” deals mostly with Neff’s second term and his efforts to enact reforms such as the establishment of a state park system, soil and water conservation, writing a new constitution, tax reform, and greater support of public education. As Brown notes, these reforms indicate a rather Progressive agenda, but when weighed with Neff’s preference for fiscal responsibility, prohibition, law enforcement, and a cautious approach to race relations, they more accurately reflect southern Progressivism that is more socially conservative than the national variety.18

17Patricia Bernstein, The First Waco Horror.
When Neff finished his term of office as governor in 1925, he held several posts that indicated continued interest in Progressive reform. Neff headed the Texas Education Survey Commission from 1925 to 1926 and was appointed to the United States Board of Mediation by President Calvin Coolidge in 1927. Upon receiving the nomination, Neff high-mindedly resolved to stay above partisan politics. Considering Neff was a Democrat who had been nominated to a federal post by a Republican, this was probably not a bad policy. But the following year was an election year and Neff got caught up in the politics anyway. In 1928, Neff was re-nominated to the position but failed Senate confirmation due to opposition from Texas’ United States Senator, Earle Mayfield. The senator held up Neff’s nomination for not supporting his own failed reelection bid in which he had been opposed by long-time Neff friend, Tom Connolly. Neff avoided taking sides in the election despite his friendship with Connolly and his own disdain for Mayfield. Neff also refused to ally himself with pro-Hoover Democrats despite receiving pressure to do so. Hoover conspicuously refused to re-nominate Neff. Finally, in 1929, Governor Daniel J. Moody appointed Neff to the Texas Railroad Commission where he served until 1932 at which time he assumed the presidency of Baylor University.19

After 1932, Neff’s political activities greatly decreased, either out of political frustration, weariness, or because the demands of running Baylor during the depths of the Depression were so taxing. Perhaps some combination of the two is more likely. In that case, Neff’s experience as a Southern Progressive would be quite typical. Journalist William Allen White famously noted as early as 1920 that Americans were "tired of issues, sick at heart of ideals, and weary of being noble." This was especially true of those who had supported Progressivism. After Neff’s political experiences in 1928, one could barely fault him for being “tired of issues” or “weary of

being noble.” In George B. Tindall’s *Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, the author expands his discussion of Progressivism. Tindall notes the southern business Progressive philosophy “had its roots in both the Progressive movement and the ‘New South’ creed of economic development.” He adds that Southern Progressives were “shaken by the Depression and the New Deal…but its policies of expansion…became the norm of Southern statecraft….” So, Neff, like many, continued his interest in Progressive reforms and industrial development as best he could. Neff’s interest in education and his leadership of Baylor, as well as his presidency of the Texas Watersheds Association in 1939, indicate this.20

One of the more important developments in Texas politics during Neff’s later years was what V.O. Key called “presidential Republicanism.” This was the phenomenon whereby otherwise reliable Democrats voted Republican in presidential elections. The process began, as Neff saw, in 1928 with “Democrats for Hoover.” In the wake of the New Deal, and opposition to it, “Republicanism” became increasingly acceptable. Key points to the example of the “Texas Regulars” who usually voted with Republicans in Congress against the New Deal but refused to support Republican candidates for president. Neff frequently found himself acting as a referee, or peacemaker, between Texas Regulars and New Dealers. Ricky Dobbs takes up where Key left off in his work *Yellow Dogs and Republicans: Allan Shivers and Texas Two-Party Politics*. At the time of Key’s writing, Allan Shivers was about to become governor of Texas. Shivers was governor of Texas from 1949 to 1957 and led the conservative wing of the Texas Democratic Party. He is also widely known for his leadership of “Democrats for Eisenhower” in the 1952 presidential election. The widespread acceptance of “presidential republicanism” marked the beginning of the South’s shift to the Republican Party. In Neff’s final years, his political

activities were very selective. Nevertheless, he chose to remain loyal to the party even though he did not support all of its policies and despite efforts by his friends to convince him otherwise.²¹

In *Origins of the New South*, C. Vann Woodward begins his discourse with the Redeemers regaining control of the South after Reconstruction and being left with the monumental task of defining and then building a “New South.” A few chapters later, in a chapter entitled “The Industrial Evolution,” Woodward discusses the many challenges of creating an urbanized and industrialized New South. Much of that challenge fell to the children and grandchildren of the Redeemers many of whom, like Neff, became southern Progressive leaders. Out of the necessity of creating the New South, southern Progressives closely identified with business Progressivism. Nevertheless, these politicians frequently clashed with conservatives. Progressive governors, like Neff as noted by George Tindall, faced considerable opposition to proposed reforms by legislators. Despite the opposition, Progressives worked diligently to make the New South a reality. Throughout his life, Neff worked on behalf of various Progressive agendas. At the turn of the century, Neff was instrumental in implementing franchise restriction. In the 1910s, Neff was a leader in the Texas prohibition movement. In the 1920s, Neff served as governor. In the late 1920s and 1930s, Neff was a major proponent of conservation. In the 1940s, Neff maintained political support for President Truman’s policies when many Texas Democrats would not. When Neff died in 1952, Texas was the first southern state to become more urban than rural, and more industrial than agricultural. By 1960, just a few years after Neff’s death, 66 percent of Texans lived in cities. The New South had finally come to Texas and Pat Neff had played a major role in the process.²²


²²Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, Chapters 1, 5, 14; Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 233,
Over the course of Neff’s lifetime, partisan politics in Texas began to turn away from the Democratic Party. Texans remained mostly conservative and thus began to consider shifting their political allegiance to the Republicans whose basic ideals more closely resembled their own. When Neff died on January 20, 1952, Shivers had yet to organize Democrats for Eisenhower. But, just one year later, Dwight D. Eisenhower was inaugurated as President after becoming the second Republican to carry Texas. In the ensuing years, the Republicanization of Texas accelerated. Texas elected John Tower as its United States Senator just eight years later. In 1984, one of Towers’ successors, Phil Gramm changed from the Democratic to the Republican Party. Texas soon offered two of its own Republicans for president—and the rest of the South followed Texas’ example. In many ways, Neff’s political life and times bracket an important period of Texas’ and the South’s political development and he was often directly involved in it.

CHAPTER 2
THE PROGRESSIVISM OF PAT NEFF

To preserve in peace and perpetuate in power, by a life of unselfish civic service, the hopes of your government and the dreams of your people, is a duty no less sublime than to fight for your country when the god of War shakes his bristling bayonets….

--Pat M. Neff

The previous passage, in addition to reflecting the views of its author, also reflects Progressive views toward government and the honor of serving in it. Perhaps more tellingly, it reveals a moralistic focus on maintaining power and control. In many ways, Pat M. Neff was a typical southern Progressive who sought change and reform within the safe confines of reason and order. In other ways, Neff was different from many national Progressives whose ideas of change and reform were guided by purely secular influences. Among Southern Progressives, often raised in reform-minded evangelical Christian churches, the phenomenon was not that unusual although it may have been somewhat pronounced in Neff’s case. The Baptist faith was never far from his heart or mind as he sought solutions to the problems of his day. For example, prohibition was the issue that was closest to his heart and often at hand. He worked longer and more consistently for this cause than any other, with the exception of his beloved Baylor University. In both cases, it was his Baptist faith that was at the forefront of his work. Unlike many Progressives, who viewed prohibition merely as a means of social control, Neff viewed it more as a moral issue. The “liquor interests” of the day were indeed a danger—but not as much a danger as alcohol itself. Neff was even able to combine the two seemingly incompatible ideas of fiscal responsibility and evangelical religion when, as chief executive, he sent policy statements to the legislature with Progressive themes such as a tax reform proposal headed,
“Render unto Caesar, that which is Caesar’s.” Most legislators would have been familiar with this reference to Jesus’ words to the Pharisees in the Book of Matthew, but many were probably somewhat befuddled by a religious reference in so secular a context. This almost inscrutable nature was a product of the two great influences in Neff’s life, Southern Progressivism and evangelical religion.

Generally, Progressives sought to instill order in the chaos they often saw around them. For Neff, countering “lawlessness” and related ills such as drinking, gambling, and other vices were at the forefront of his agenda. According to historian Robert Wiebe, the societal, political, and economic turmoil of the period between 1877 and 1920 threatened not only order, but control that Progressive leaders either wielded or coveted. Wiebe noted, “…these years witnessed a fundamental shift in American values, from those of the small town in the 1880s to those of a new bureaucratic-minded middle class by 1920.” He adds, “The new middle class of largely urban professional men and women developed the new values of continuity, regularity, functionality, rationality, administration, and management.” As the country faced the challenges of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration, Progressive leaders, the new urban elite, sought to develop an activist government, under their control, to bring order to a chaotic world. Wiebe saw the phenomenon as “transformative” in that during this period the country changed from one of local interests and control to one of increasingly centralized and bureaucratized government. Neff personifies this movement; he was born on a farm, went to law school and became an attorney, and later ran for office in chaotic times. He was elected governor of Texas in 1920 in what was essentially a battle between Progressive and conservative Democrats for control of state government.¹

According to Wiebe, during the 1880s and 1890s, a period encompassing Neff’s formative years, the country faced a “Crisis in the Community.” Generally, the growth of the federal government, along with the increasing power and influence of big businesses, like the railroads, caused an erosion of state and local control. Wiebe cites the examples of two Texas governors of that period, John Reagan and James S. Hogg who sought to counter “alien,” or out-of-state, companies. Ultimately, this resulted in Texas’ regulation of the insurance industry, as well as, Hogg’s establishment of the Texas Railroad Commission, with Reagan as commissioner. It is important to remember that this desire for “local” control was not limited to politicians who wished merely to maintain their own power and influence, but also extended to more common folk—like farmers. Much of Hogg’s reforms were born of the need to limit defections of disaffected farmers from the Democratic Party to the Populists. This crisis of local control was deeply influential in Neff’s general political philosophy and career. Neff entered politics in 1898 just two years after the collapse of the Populists. Neff and Hogg later joined forces to limit the political insurgency of Texas farmers. Many years later, as governor, Neff suggested what he called an “Alien Lands Law” which prohibited out-of-state ownership of large tracts in the state. The measure would have opened more land for yeoman farmers but failed because legislators either did not understand its necessity or questioned its legality.2

By the late 1890s, Wiebe believes that many at the community level “generated their own nationwide crisis” and responded to change as an “immediate threat” to order. This phenomenon largely explains the reaction of urban elites to labor disturbances as well as that of establishment Southern Democrats to the populist political insurgency. Wiebe noted, “Populism met an even cooler reception among the gentlemanly reformers in the cities.” Such men were proponents of

2 Wiebe, The Search for Order., 54-5; “Crisis in the Community” is the title of Chapter Three of Wiebe’s work.
an urban, industrial, New South; they were unwilling to let labor strife and corporate greed impede progress. Again, the example of James Hogg is offered as one who balanced agreement with Populists on issues like railroad regulation while pursuing policies aimed at modernization. Organized labor posed an interesting challenge for budding Progressives for it was an unavoidable product of urbanization and industrialization yet its radicalization posed a significant threat to order. Political leaders often balanced the competing interests of organized labor and big business especially at election time. Strikes immediately put politicians in a quandary and resulted in reluctance for “promiscuous use of troops against strikes.” Neff’s entry into politics and his political alignment with Hogg indicate his participation in the phenomenon. Governor Neff’s handling of the Railroad Shopmen’s Strike of 1922, in which he initially resisted federal pressure to use Texas National Guard troops to break the strike, is especially indicative of this.3

In the 1910s and 1920s, the Progressives’ desire to impose order was best exemplified by the prohibition movement. Wiebe noted that the movement gained new popularity at the time as a means of “social control,” and prohibitionists spoke of “the disappearance of the saloon and the rampaging drunk.” Such rhetoric was often only a thin veil for racism and class warfare. Many of the arguments for prohibition and “sobriety” were as a means of race and political control with the references to “rampaging drunks” alluding to African Americans and poor whites. There is no indication that Neff ever engaged in race baiting or class warfare. Nevertheless, the prohibitionist cause sparked in Neff a renewed interest in politics as he engaged in a statewide speaking campaign for the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment working directly with the Anti-Saloon League of Texas. Following his election in 1920, one of the biggest challenges Neff

faced was “lawlessness,” or general civic disorder. Mob violence, lynching, and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, during Neff’s tenure in office qualify as disorder on a massive scale. The fact that Neff often chose to present his administration as one of “law and order” in the face of these challenges further accentuates Neff’s Progressive nature.4

One of Wiebe’s more interesting discussions is about the association of Progressivism and Protestant religion. This discussion is especially useful in understanding Neff and his personal and political philosophies. Wiebe noted that Progressives often concentrated on the ideals of “purity” and “unity” that were the result of Christian influences. According to Wiebe, “Probably the largest number of worried Americans looked for peace and unity in Protestantism, the most natural of all reservoirs of hope.” Thus, when faced with violence and disorder, Progressives like Neff fell back on their religious upbringings both for comfort and for answers. They sought to solve problems on their own under the common assumption that “God helps those who help themselves.” In something of an allusion to the “clock maker” view of the universe, Wiebe noted, most Progressives “conceived the world as an orderly affair where societies, like planets, functioned according to rational laws.” Progressives, it seems, were always looking for that “one gear askew” that could be “reset” in order to make their world balanced again. Neff very much followed this pattern. In many ways, alcohol was the “one gear askew” for him but he championed other issues as well. Neff was active in the Baptist church and was one of the few laymen to serve as President of the Southern Baptist Convention.5

Where Wiebe explores Progressivism as a national trend, historian Dewey Grantham has offered a more focused look at southern Progressivism. As Wiebe has shown, Progressives of all kinds were concerned with social control and order. Though this is certainly true of southern

---

4 Wiebe, The Search for Order, 290-1.
Progressives as well, there are some other differences. According to Grantham, southern Progressivism was largely “indigenous” and “unmistakably possessed a strong conservative cast….intent on the reconciliation of progress and tradition.” More directly, it attempted to “modernize the South and to humanize its institutions without abandoning it’s more desirable values and traditions.” Southern Progressives were united by “common goals and social values” as well as a desire for an “orderly and cohesive community” that was “differentiated by race and class.” They also tended to have a “paternalistic” approach to dealing with social problems as well as a belief that social ills could be relieved via economic development. Generally, southern Progressives, like their business Progressive brethren, focused on economic development and advocated moderate positions on most other policies. While both types of Progressives tended to avoid social issues, southern Progressives took great care not to upset their region’s racial apple cart. Demographically, southern Progressives were similar to those elsewhere comprising doctors, lawyers, legislators, ministers, educators, newspaper editors, and agricultural scientists among others. Here Neff fits neatly into Grantham’s characterization as do his friends and colleagues.6

Southern Progressives often talked of the virtue of the people and the greatness of democratic government, usually in glowing Jeffersonian tones. However, Grantham noted, “their concept of democracy was limited.” Many middle and upper-class southern Progressives held a “deep distrust of the masses whether black or white.” Frequently, the issue of race was used as a means to an end—political control. For some, racial segregation and Black disfranchisement served to “soften” the differences between white men and thus facilitate political debate. This was one of the arguments used to gain public acceptance of the mandatory

---

poll tax. For others, class was the issue. While many southern Progressives sought to “uplift” and educate poor whites, they were aware of their “prejudices and narrow mindedness” and “obsession with the race question.” Their frequent lack of education also called into question their general suitability as voting citizens. Thus, disfranchisement of blacks, who were usually poor, and poor whites through means such as a mandatory poll tax served to remove them both from the political realm and left political discourse to the upper classes. As a state legislator, Neff was instrumental in passage of the mandatory poll tax in Texas. Later, as governor, he quietly sought to counter the Ku Klux Klan and took action to thwart lynching. Neff never used racist rhetoric or engaged in class warfare, but in these two cases, he clearly intended to maintain political and social control over others.7

Grantham also directly addressed politics in Texas. He noted that Texas is “clearly a part of the South” that was also differentiated by a “western outlook” and a more diversified economy. Mostly because of oil, Texas’ diversified economy displayed “remarkable growth.” More important, the vibrant Texas economy allowed the state’s business and political leaders to effectively pursue greater economic development. For this reason, Texas became a bastion of business Progressivism especially after the turn of the century. Nevertheless, Texas’ relative prosperity did not translate into political harmony—which was absolutely essential for proper economic development. Interestingly, Grantham points to two instances where the state’s political harmony was most threatened. The first of these was the Populist Revolt of the mid 1890s which, as noted by Grantham shook Texas politics. The second instance Grantham points to is the struggle over the prohibition issue in the 1910s that was the most divisive issue among Texas Democrats. What is interesting is that these are the two very same instances where Neff

7Grantham, Southern Progressivism, xvii, 31.
chose to become directly involved in statewide politics. In the first instance, Neff ran for state representative immediately after the Populist Revolt and led those “reformers” seeking to limit political insurgency. In the second, Neff served as a statewide spokesman for the prohibition movement. Neff parlayed this into his election as governor in a close and bitter race in 1920.8

As Neff came to the governorship in 1921, social and political control became more difficult to maintain. By this time, according to Grantham, urbanization and modernization transformed politics from that of “cultural consensus” to that of “cultural conflict.” While southern Progressives embraced change and modernity, albeit on their own terms, others rejected it—sometimes violently. Moreover, the struggle over prohibition sapped the strength of the southern reform movement. Enforcing prohibition was also a monumental problem. Seeking to impose cultural values put southern Progressives on the “defensive” and generally made additional reform difficult. Nevertheless, southern Progressivism was not dead. In fact, its socially conservative, business friendly nature was well-suited to the “business culture” of the 1920s. The decade’s penchant for “good government” and “efficiency” was also consistent with the philosophies of southern Progressives. As governor, Neff spent much of his time trying to maintain order but still sought to institute efficient government and foster economic growth. After serving as governor, Neff continued to work for causes he believed in, such as soil and water conservation, and state parks. The Progressive spirit never died in him, it was just channeled into a few specific causes.9

Grantham also discussed the role of religion in southern Progressivism. According to Grantham, southern churches were major supporters of existing institutions yet were also an “agent of change.” The evangelical nature of southern religion fostered a strong belief in social

---

gospel that translated into social reform. This was reinforced by a pervasive view of life as a continuing battle between good and evil. Grantham noted that urban middle-class Christians were the most attentive to the “social implications” of their religion, but even some fundamentalists began to turn to reform in the face of the social and economic disparity of the modern world. Southern Progressives frequently used religious arguments for social reform thus giving it a “moral-religious tone.” So, in southern Progressivism, Protestant religion was doubly important because it was not merely an inspiration for reform, it was a justification for it. One of the largest, and strongest, Protestant denominations in the South was the Baptists. Although Baptists tended to live in rural areas and were socially conservative, according to Grantham, they “discovered elements of relevance in the new social Christianity.” Furthermore, “they tended to enter the arena of social reform by way of the prohibition movement.” Thus engaged, these social reformers had difficulty distinguishing between “legitimate and illegitimate religious concerns.” Neff’s Baptist faith was probably the most influential force in his life. This life-long teetotaler was a prohibitionist many years after prohibition was repealed. He was also a long-time supporter of Baptist-sponsored social services.¹⁰

The combination of social reform, social gospel, and traditional Christian values is somewhat intricate. William Link saw the Progressive era as a struggle between radically divergent views of society. In many ways, Link’s work is an extension of that of Wiebe and Grantham. Link noted that southern Progressives walked a fine line between tradition and progress and frequently needed the support of political opponents to effect change. Reformers faced opposition from established community, or local, powers. According to Link, “Reformers offered uplift and improvement but wanted to limit participation and control. They discovered

¹⁰Grantham, Southern Progressivism, 16-7, 19.
that success depended on the cooperation of communities that were reluctant to sacrifice control.” This meant that southern Progressives needed to compromise, and as Grantham has noted, reconcile reform with tradition. The one issue that allowed them to do this, Link argues, was prohibition. He noted the cause “enjoyed a significant degree of popular support” that was “deeply rooted in evangelical notions of human behavior, sin and social order.” Thus far, Link is in line with Wiebe and Grantham. Nevertheless, Link makes an important contribution noting that prohibition not only united unlikely allies but also mobilized southern public opinion for reform for the first time. This is particularly true in Texas as noted by Lewis Gould, who has given extensive treatment of the connection of the prohibition movement to Progressive reform in the state in *Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democrats in the Wilson Era.*

Link’s treatment of the connection of the prohibition movement, evangelical Christian ideals of social reform, and the larger Progressive reform movement is very useful in understanding the development and motivations of Neff’s Progressivism. According to Link, prohibition was the “centerpiece” of southern reform. More importantly, the South led the movement, and instead of appearing backward as it usually did, was at the vanguard of reform. Thus, southern success on the issue of prohibition lent a sense of prestige and accomplishment to Progressive reformers like Neff. This was only natural given the difficulties prohibitionists often faced due to organized opposition from distillers, brewers, and distributors. Southern reformers themselves organized; thus, organizations like the Anti-Saloon League of Texas, of which Neff was a member, opposed organizations like the Texas Brewers’ Association. Prohibitionists used a variety of tactics in opposing the liquor interests. These included employing traveling public speakers, like Neff, to portray them as purveyors of impurity, sin, and social and familial

---

violence. Prohibitionists frequently used the tactic of pursuing “local option” elections to ban
the manufacture, sale, and distribution of alcoholic beverages at the county and municipal level.
Neff successfully led such a campaign in Waco in 1917.\textsuperscript{12}

Echoing Grantham, Link also notes the importance of southern churches to Progressive
reform. Churches often exhorted “service to social progress.” Many Progressives called for
“Moral reform” and “social purity” that moved beyond prohibition to include gambling,
prostitution, smoking, and other vices. The faithful, like Neff, answered the call. Historian Paul
Harvey has built upon the works mentioned thus far to explain how and why this happened.
Harvey has focused on the role of religion in the shaping of southern society and politics with
considerable attention paid to Neff’s Baptist denomination. One of Harvey’s major themes is the
strong connection between religion and politics in the South. Harvey offered the interesting
example of the term “redemption,” a word with powerful religious meaning that was given
powerful political meaning by southerners. According to Harvey, the word in Biblical terms
means “washed in blood,” but in political terms, refers to the “return of white democrats to
power in the 1870s.” It is important to remember that the choice of the usage of the word in this
context dates to the period and was specifically chosen by the Redeemers. Thus, as Harvey has
pointed out, this usage of the term, “graphically symbolizes the often bloody mixing of religion
and politics in the post-bellum South.” By extension, the argument can be made that religion is a
constant undercurrent in southern politics—it influenced the redeemers, the Progressives, and
Neff.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{13} Gould, \textit{Progressives and Prohibitionists}, 111-2; Paul Harvey. \textit{Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identity among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 11; Harvey frequently uses the term “Christian Progressives.” Harvey’s choice of terminology further accentuates the diversity of political and philosophical ideals within the greater Progressive movement; See also Eighmy, John Lee. \textit{Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists} (Knoxville: University
\end{thebibliography}
Neff’s Baptist denomination became one the largest and most influential in the South. Harvey has noted how the church grew from one of “small outposts of radically democratic plain folk religion” in the eighteenth century to one that was “conservative and culturally dominant” in the twentieth century. The prohibition issue, and Baptists’ position on it, symbolized the change. Initially, southern Baptists opposed prohibition favoring “moral suasion” over legal remedies on the basis of the principle of separation of church and state. By the 1880s, this began to change. Harvey cites the example of B.H. Carroll who saw prohibition in terms of its being of “vital interest … individually … collectively, socially and intellectually, civically and politically, financially, morally, and religiously.” This overarching view of the importance of prohibition was no doubt held by many southern Progressives, and especially evangelical Christians, in the 1910s. Interestingly, Carroll was a benefactor of Neff’s alma mater, Baylor University, for whom one of the oldest buildings on campus is named. Harvey also cites the example of J.B. Cranfill, who was one of the best known Baptist preachers in Texas, who ran for office on the Prohibitionist Party ticket. Neff and Cranfill corresponded for many years and frequently worked together both within and outside of the church. Harvey also noted that the Southern Baptist Convention passed its first temperance resolution in 1886 and pledged to use any “proper ways” bring about prohibition. Alcohol and its associated social evils were enough to bring Baptists like Carroll, Cranfill, and Neff into politics.14

As prohibition became increasingly political, southern Progressives became more politically sophisticated and experienced. By the 1910s, they believed that alcohol required not only “individual purification” but also “systematic legislative remedies” that were “enforceable.”

---

14Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 3, 216.
According to Harvey, the Prohibition movement combined “evangelical zeal” with sophisticated campaign techniques that made possible a broad and effective base of supporters that included bureaucrats, businessmen, and evangelical among others. Thus, southern Progressives, like Neff, learned the arts of large-scale campaigning and consensus building. By the end of the 1910s, Progressivism reached its height. Passage of the 18th Amendment made prohibition the law of the land in 1919. The end of the First World War also brought a “great flourishing of religious Progressivism.” Many were optimistic about the country’s future, world peace, and Christianity, but not all. With the successful conclusion of the prohibition campaign, the coalition that it held together began to break down. Baptists themselves, according to Harvey, developed two distinct views of the future of American evangelicalism. The Progressive view favored a “gradual diffusion of a democratic Christianity” that favored human rights over imperialism. Conservatives and fundamentalists, on the other hand, feared not only for the future of democracy and freedom but also for Christianity itself. They held religion above all else. Neff’s views seem more in line with the Progressive view. These two views of the world, and Christianity, have largely persisted to this day and were deeply influential on Neff during his lifetime and especially during his tenure as President of the Southern Baptist Convention at the close of the Second World War.15

The issue of race was both pervasive and dangerously divisive in southern life. The issue effected the South socially, economically, politically, and even religiously. Southern leaders, both secular and spiritual, had to deal with the issue of race whether they wanted to or not. Some chose to use it for their own purposes, others chose to avoid it. Harvey has also explored the intricate interrelationship of race, civil rights, and religion with special emphasis on the latter.

15Ibid., 218, 222-5.
According to Harvey, many southern evangelicals, both black and white, have understood the history of the region, as well as its society and politics, in terms of Progressive narrative. Harvey uses three key ideas to explain this interrelationship: theological racism, racial interchange, and Christian interracialism. Theological racism refers to the tendency of conservative white Christians to use religion to enforce and reinforce social hierarchies—essentially the use of religion to reinforce white supremacy. Racial interchange refers to the inevitable exchange of ideals and practices of white and black denominations that shared common beliefs. Christian interchange refers to the tendency of more liberal southern Christians’ use of religious doctrine or ideals to undermine the South’s existing racial system. All of these interrelated ideas are important in understanding the importance of religion in southern political and social life. All are important to understanding Neff’s life and career because they offer insight into his motivations and actions.16

According to Harvey, the period between 1890 and 1955 was one of struggle between religious conservatives and more liberal-minded Christians. This is a period that neatly encompasses Neff’s initial foray into politics in 1898 and his death in 1952. During this period, Progressive minded Christians sought to purify politics using religious ideals as a basis for a just society for southerners of both races. Furthermore, many of these Christian reformers were of a small-town middle-class background that saw Protestant missions as a model for their efforts. These included, “prohibition, public health and education, higher education, industrial development and disfranchisement.” Like other Progressives, Christian reformer professed support for democracy while seeking to impose social and political control. After the Second World War, the struggle between conservative and more liberal Christians began to reach a head.

16Paul Harvey, Freedom’s Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 1-3.
Harvey concluded that after the war, “the South was poised for, and fearful of change.” This of course set the stage for political and social upheaval during the 1950s and 1960s as well as Christian fundamentalism in the 1970s and 1980s. Harvey’s assessment of Progressive minded Christians is uncannily similar to Neff’s own career and philosophies. Neff was an urban professional, from the city of Waco, Texas whose initial foray into state politics included the pursuit of franchise restriction. His second entry into state politics was precipitated by his interest in prohibition. Neff left politics in the name of higher education for the presidency of Baylor University. Ironically, Neff was forced into retirement by religious conservatives over his support of President Harry S. Truman.17

Progressive minded Christians also recognized the importance and need of political action in the pursuit of their goals. This idea is apparent in the title of Neff’s book, The Battles of Peace. The book is a compilation of some of Neff’s speeches, several of which also contain biblically based rhetorical references. The author’s Progressive and Christian values are immediately apparent in many, if not most, of the speeches. In the speech from which the book takes its title, Neff quoted English poet John Milton who wrote “Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war.” This was Neff’s thesis. The speech, written during the First World War, used broad and sweeping language as it heralded high-minded Progressive ideals, Christian values of peace, and patriotism. For example, Neff wrote, “Not in battleships sweeping the ocean with their guns, but in church houses teaching ‘peace on earth, good will to men’; not in arsenals bursting with bullets, but in school rooms filled with books; not in marching armies…but in the toiling millions…will be found…the honor, the glory, the strength of the republic.” Neff then appealed to his audience to maintain the struggle for Christian and

---

17Ibid., 47-8, 53, 106.
Progressive ideals when he stated, “The battles for freedom and for liberty, for truth and for right, have not yet ended. The struggle for the highest, the noblest, and the best in the world of peace, has just begun.” The rhetoric is unmistakable in its zeal for both Progressivism and Christianity.\(^{18}\)

As noted earlier, Neff frequently used biblical references in political speeches. The previously mentioned tax speech entitled “Render unto Caesar the Things that are Caesars” appealed for tax equalization in general, but also called for an oil and gas tax, a corporate income tax, and better tax collection. Other than the title, there is not any other religious reference, but Neff’s views on taxation are very Progressive in nature. In another example of Neff’s use of religious references in political speeches, he called for a Constitutional Convention in a speech entitled, “No Man Soweth a Piece of New Cloth unto an Old Garment.” The title is taken from the Book of Matthew and refers to the necessity of starting over with something new rather than fixing something that is old and outdated. In this case, Neff was referring to Texas’ Constitution of 1876 that was old, inflexible, and subject to frequent amendment. By the time Neff made the appeal the document was already long and cumbersome; the Constitutional Convention never materialized and the document is still in force today. Whether Neff used such religious references merely as a matter of style or as a means to communicate with audiences that frequently had more religious education than formal education is not known. Nonetheless, Neff clearly, and frequently, called on religious references to convey meaning—especially when the subject was important.\(^{19}\)

In 1917, Neff made what may well have been the most important speech in his political life. Entitled “A Call to Arms,” it is the final and by far longest speech appearing in The Battles

\(^{18}\)Paul Harvey, _Freedom’s Coming_, 47; Pat M. Neff, _The Battles of Peace_, 56.

\(^{19}\)Pat M. Neff, _The Battles of Peace_, 79-84, 19.
of Peace. The speech, containing several religious references, marked the beginning of the campaign to make McLennan County dry. Neff was acting in his capacity as chairman of the McLennan County Prohibition Campaign. He began the speech with typical Progressive and prohibitionist rhetoric on the evils of alcohol calling it “chronic criminal of the centuries” and the “prolific mother of many evils.” Neff continued, that “There is no law it will not break, no outlaw it will not shelter, no cradle it will not rob, no grave it will not dishonor, no woman it will not disgrace, and no man it will not destroy.” Neff then turned to the Bible as he referred to Matthew 7:16, reminding the religious among them that, “By their fruits, ye shall know them.” Neff posed the question, “If we value the saloon as we value a peach tree, by the fruit it bears, what shall our verdict be?” For those who failed to see the point despite his already damning indictment of alcohol, he added, “The saloon produces lawbreakers and criminals.” As Neff drew to a close, he told the audience it was “An opportune time to close saloons.” Finally, Neff appealed to Progressive ideals of civic duty while at the same time once again invoking the Bible as he referred to Joshua 24:15 with “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.” The choice was clear, one could serve good or evil; one could serve the saloon interests or support prohibition. In the end, the prohibition campaign in McLennan County was successful. More importantly, the campaign helped define Neff in the eyes of voters throughout the state.20

Neff’s Progressive and Christian ideals were strong and almost inseparable. He was typically Progressive in many ways. He clearly believed in maintaining social control and was an early champion of franchise restriction. Neff’s views on taxation, soil and water conservation, and state parks were also in line with those of national Progressives. Nevertheless, like many southern Progressives, Neff’s evangelical Christianity was deeply influential in his

politics. This is especially true of the issue of prohibition which Neff supported on mostly moral
grounds. One of the strongest examples of Neff’s Christian and Progressive ideals is his use of
religious references in political speeches. Many of Neff’s most important speeches combined
both Christian and Progressive rhetoric. In later years, Neff continued to work for Progressive
and Christian ideals; his presidencies of Baylor University and the Southern Baptist Convention
are indicative of this. As noted earlier, Progressivism embraced a wide variety of reform issues;
not all Progressives supported all of them. Although Neff is best described as a southern
Progressive, he had his own brand of Progressivism. Like many national Progressives, Neff
championed conservation of soil and water resources and the development of state parks. Like
all southern Progressives, Neff embraced economic development and avoided racial issues. Also
like many, but not all, southern Progressives, evangelical Christianity played a major role in
Neff’s political ideals. Moreover, Neff’s Progressive political ideals remained throughout his
lifetime.
CHAPTER 3
TEXAS IN THE 1890s: A POLITICAL TIME AND PLACE

In 1850 the population of Texas was 212,500, in 1870 818,000, we now number two and half million….No ten years [probably referring to period circa 1878-1888] has brought about as much change as the last ten in Texas. The iron track reaches from the cities on the Gulf to the Indian Territory and has connected our eastern borders with the Rio Grande….People of all classes and climates has [sic] poured into Texas the last few years….

--Pat M. Neff

As the passage above indicates, the Texas of Neff’s youth was marked by rapid growth and change. The state experienced a transformation from the old, rural, and agrarian to the new, urban, and industrial. Its inhabitants could look back to the recent past and see a rustic frontier; if they looked ahead they could see a prosperous, modern, Texas seemingly unfolding before their very eyes. At the time the passage was written, Neff was a resident of the burgeoning young city of Waco, Texas. Like many of the town’s residents, he was fresh off the farm. The future governor often related the story of how he came to town atop a bale of cotton grown on his family’s farm in neighboring Coryell County. The sale of the cotton funded Neff’s first year at Baylor University in the spring of 1889. Cotton, in fact, funded much of Texas’ prosperity, and, agriculture remained the states’ number one “industry.” Nevertheless, Texas’ continued economic dependence on the cultivation of cotton was a curse as much as a blessing. Ever-increasing production resulted in ever-decreasing prices and soaring debt for Texas cotton farmers. The combination of socio-political change and economic uncertainty provided a breeding ground for discontent and discord. The Texas of Neff’s youth held both great promise and great volatility. Events born of this phenomenon, such as the Populist Revolt of 1896 and
the assassination of political and social critic William Cowper Brann, known as the “the iconoclast,” greatly influenced his politics for years to come.

The year after Neff arrived in Waco, the Census Office of the United States Department of the Interior conducted the nation’s eleventh census. It confirmed the continued rapid growth in population of Texas from 1,501,749 in 1880 to 2,235,523 in 1890. That growing population was an affirmation of the promise of Texas as well as its people’s confidence in a prosperous future. Though the state’s population remained overwhelmingly rural, urban areas saw considerable growth. In fact, between 1880 and 1890, Texas’ urban population effectively doubled to approximately 20 percent of the total population. McLennan County, of which Waco is the seat of government, saw its population grow from 28,934 in 1880 to 39,204 in 1890. Meanwhile, the city of Waco grew from 7,295 to 14,445. During the 1880s, Texas made tremendous strides toward an urbanized and industrialized New South. Nevertheless, Texas remained 80 percent rural and agricultural. Thus, the state’s politics were dominated by farming and the needs of farmers.  

Unfortunately, Texas farmers faced increasing economic uncertainty. According to census data from 1890, 65 percent of males over the age of ten were engaged in occupations related to agriculture, fishing, or mining. Nearly 40 percent of women and girls were similarly employed. Meanwhile, only 58 percent of Texas farmers owned their own land in 1890, down from 62 percent in 1880. Worse still, approximately 33 percent of Texas farmers were sharecroppers who were especially vulnerable. The preference of creditors to be paid with a share of the cotton crop further fueled over-production. In 1880, Texas farmers produced 1.2 million bales of cotton; in 1890, they produced nearly 2 million bales. The ever-increasing

---

production of cotton led to supply outstripping demand and decreasing prices. In 1880, a pound of cotton was priced at $.098; in 1890, the price was $.086 per pound. The price plummeted during the 1890s falling to its lowest price of $.046 per pound in 1894. Understandably, debt was a major problem of Texas farmers who on average owed approximately forty percent of the value of their farms in 1890. Discontent was a natural result of such unbearable circumstances.2

Texas farmers began organizing in the face of continued “hard times” as early as 1877, with the advent of the Texas Farmers Alliance. Initially, the organization focused on economic issues and became a major critic of the crop lien system. The Alliance also offered economic strategies to improve the plight of farmers such as cooperative stores and crop subtreasuries. After 1890, the Texas Farmers Alliance became increasingly political; in 1892, the Alliance formally endorsed the People’s Party. The relationship between the two organizations grew throughout the 1890s as they joined forces to become the prime purveyors of political insurgency in Texas. According to sociologist Donna A. Barnes, the Texas Farmers’ Alliance and People’s Party constituted a protest movement born under the pressures of urbanization, economic depression, and a general need for change. In the long-term, the coalition was successful at bringing change, but only at tremendous costs. Nevertheless, through much of the 1890s, these organizations were the main speakers for the poor, struggling farmers of Texas.3

---


3Donna A. Barnes, Farmers in Rebellion, 3-4, 9-10, 198; See also Robert McMath, Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers’ Alliance (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), McMath traces the history of the Southern Farmers’ Alliance from its beginnings in central Texas and its rapid growth. Charles Postel’s Populist Vision has been cited previously and offers a more recent treatment.
The election of 1890 marked something of a political awakening for Texas farmers. Their increased political interest drew the attention of establishment politicians and newspapermen alike. An editorial in Neff’s hometown newspaper, the *Waco Daily News*, entitled “The Farmer in Politics” noted the phenomenon. The editors remarked, “There is a great deal said just now about the disposition of the farmers to take a hand in political contests and the politician is not a little excited over it.” The editors no doubt very accurately expressed the sentiments of many farmers and at the same time revealed the root cause of political dissatisfaction with the following: “The farmers have...been at home attending to their own business and depending on their professional politicians to conduct the affairs of state. They have discovered…that while they were hard at work…these trusted servants have joined with the enemies of good government to drive them to the wall.” The editors noted how high taxes and debt, often fostered by poor government policy, had caused farmers to recognize they were “in a position from which there was no escape.” Finally, the *Daily News* placed great confidence in farmers, while warning politicians to “rest assured that the independence and courage of the American farmer, backed by honest convictions, will insure results that will be for the welfare of the great mass of the people of the whole country.” Thus, the advice to worried politicians was to do the people’s bidding—especially the farmers.⁴

That fall of 1890, Texans pinned their gubernatorial hopes on James S. “Jim” Hogg. As Texas Attorney General, Hogg had a solid record as a reformer. Hogg enforced laws limiting railroads and land companies’ sales of land to the public and helped write Texas’ first anti-trust law, only the second such law in the nation. Consequently, Hogg also broke-up the Texas Traffic Association, a body made-up of railroad representatives who colluded to pool traffic and

fix rates. Hogg ran for governor on a platform consisting chiefly of a promise to establish a state railroad commission. Hogg’s record, along with his promise to limit railroads, brought victory at the polls—with support of farmers. The editors of the Waco Weekly News, like many Texans, expressed optimism about the new governor noting, “a new administration with respect to issues will take charge….manned by new men, but bearing the same democratic flag and guided by the same democratic principles, though applied in a manner more in keeping with a progressive age.” The Weekly News proclaimed, “Big things are expected of the new administration….The News believes Mr. Hogg will be equal to the occasion.” Hogg’s platform, and his subsequent election, were direct responses to political unrest among Texas farmers.5

As governor, Hogg pursued and won several important reforms embodied in what became known as the “Hogg Laws.” These included a law establishing the Railroad Commission, a law forcing land corporations to sell off their holdings in fifteen years, and the “Alien Land Law,” which checked further grants to foreign corporations in an effort to get the land into the hands of Texans. In spite of Hogg’s good faith efforts at reforms, many either distrusted establishment democrats’ long-term commitment or favored more radical reform. In December of 1890, a few weeks prior to Hogg’s inauguration, Farmers Alliance representatives met in Ocala, Florida. They authored the “Ocala Demands” which called for several reforms that one could consider either innovative or radical. These included demands to eliminate national banks, ensure cheap credit, free silver, an alien land law, reduced tariffs, elected United States senators, and government control and ownership of the telephone, telegraph, and railroad

---

industries. In 1892, the Ocala Demands became the basis of the “Omaha Platform,” the centerpiece of People’s Party policy for years to come. 6

By 1896, just two years before Neff’s entry into politics, Texas Democrats’ efforts to stem the tide of political insurgency had mostly failed. Hogg’s program had not calmed the fears, or adequately addressed the needs, of Texas’ farmers and industrial workers. By this time, the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party, or Populists, had joined forces and became increasingly powerful and vocal in state politics. The Southern Mercury was the voice of the Texas’ working-class. The paper, published in Dallas, was an organ of the Texas Farmers’ Alliance, and the unofficial journal of the People’s Party of Texas. The Southern Mercury also provided a forum for the Populist leaders, including its renowned African-American speaker, John B. Raynor. As Texans prepared to go to the polls, at the height of what became known as the “Populist Revolt,” Raynor traveled the state in support of the Omaha Platform and Populist candidates. He also let the establishment know exactly what they were facing as he stated, “Governments have their birth, growth, decline and fall, and then become extinct. The same is true of all political parties.” He added, “when any party has accomplished its mission…people will discover the necessity for a new political party to lead them.” In an obvious allusion to the Texas Democratic Party, Raynor noted, “Whenever any party willfully ignores brain and experience, and elevates a lot of political nondescripts to places of honor and power, it is evidence…that the party is in an irredeemable condition and will soon be shelved.” Thus,

Raynor asserts that the Texas Democratic Party had become entrenched and free to foist whatever political leadership it deemed upon the people of the state.\(^7\)

Raynor continued by taking issue with that very leadership. Hogg, the “piney woods parvenu” as he called him, had been “very ambitious” and “foxy enough” in his pursuit of the “gubernatorial chair.” According to Raynor, Hogg used the issue of the establishment of the Texas Railroad Commission as a wedge issue that created a “hiatus between the laborer and the capitalist” and “hatred, bitter and lasting” between farmer and the railroads. Raynor noted, “The Hogg administration has given us a useless and expensive railroad commission, for the farmer and laborer to support.” The Populist leader also pointed to the recent selection of Horace Chilton, a relative political unknown, to represent Texas in the United States Senate over better-known men, such as Lawrence “Sul” Ross or John Ireland, as an example of the Texas Democratic Party’s arrogance and indifference. Democratic leaders’ monetary policies were scorned as Raynor mocked John H. Reagan’s “silver enema” and George Clark’s “gold cathartic.” Raynor’s implication was that Texans, especially farmers and the working class, would not be led astray by wedge issues, nor would they fall prey to empty political overtures.\(^8\)

Meanwhile, Raynor’s presence and importance among Populist leaders is indicative of the extent to which the party, and populism itself, was a “wedge” splitting supporters of the two established parties. For the People’s Party to be successful, it needed to draw the support of the disaffected—especially white farmers who traditionally supported the Democrats and blacks who supported the Republicans. The whites saw little progress by the Democrats in reforming the crop-lien system; blacks saw themselves shut out of the newly “lily-white” Republican Party.

\(^7\)J.B. Raynor, “Political Imbroglio in Texas,” Southern Mercury, April 9, 1896; See also Gregg Cantrell, Kenneth and John B. Raynor and the Limits of Southern Dissent (Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

\(^8\)J.B. Raynor, “Political Imbroglio in Texas,” Southern Mercury, April 9, 1896.
The creation of this unlikely coalition posed great political danger for the established parties, especially the Democrats. It also flew in the face of southern racial tradition. Raynor, a founding member of the People’s Party in Texas, was thus both highly controversial and completely necessary. Populist leaders realized the necessity of a black “voice” to appeal to disaffected African Americans; Raynor was quite effective in this role. The challenge for Raynor and other Populist leaders was to build this coalition of the disaffected to a critical mass without the divisiveness of race causing it to fly apart. Their ability to do that would dictate their political success.9

In 1896, the Southern Mercury also gave voice to Texas gubernatorial candidate, and one of the Populists’ most able speakers, Jerome C. Kearby. In an article, Kearby spoke on behalf of “partisan labor” while offering criticism of Gilded Age America. Kearby posed several important questions. He began by noting, “An overwhelming majority of this nation are wealth producers, toilers, laborers. Why are all the laws, all the national and state policies, in the interest of combines, trusts, syndicates, and corporations?” The candidate also noted how the major political parties supported those same corporate interests. Kearby then asked, “How are you to be emancipated from …political, legal, and social slavery? By continuing present conditions?” To those who sought to convince the working class to avoid partisanship altogether, Kearby asked, “when one of your fraternity asks you…to vote to perpetuate present conditions….he is a political coward, a traitor, or the hired or suborned tool of the money power.” Thus, Kearby argued that working-class people should support the People’s Party in the face of “money interests” who used the established political parties to maintain political,

---

9Gregg Cantrell, Kenneth and John B. Raynor and the Limits of Southern Dissent, 204-5, 209-10.
economic, and social primacy. Furthermore, Kearby implied that those working people who did not support the People’s Party were traitors to their class.\(^\text{10}\)

The *Southern Mercury* also reprinted a campaign stump speech that Kearby gave in Greenville, Texas, on June 13, 1896, in its entirety. Echoing Raynor’s rhetoric, Kearby referred to the upcoming election and the possibility of removing the Democrats as a “day of emancipation” from the “despotism of party.” Kearby neatly presented the economic state of Texas’ working class stating, “Our people are debt-ridden; the interest we pay oppressive and burdensome, our taxes have been doubled, our governments, state, county and city have become extravagant.” He noted, “universal discontent prevails everywhere.” Kearby then laid the responsibility for the condition of the people squarely at the feet of establishment Democrats noting, “In Texas, there can be no question as to who is responsible for the distress that prevails here. For nearly twenty-three years there has been one continuous, unbroken succession of Democratic rule in state, county, and city.” He also noted the party had been responsible for “every law” and “every tax” in the same period. Most damning, Kearby accused the Democrats not only of creating the conditions of the time, but also of being unwilling to address them, stating it had “defied reform, progress, economy, the welfare of the people.” Kearby, the Populist, thus presented the case of the people against the Texas Democratic Party. To many Democrats, including a young Neff, the divisive rhetoric and disaffection aimed at their party must have been troublesome.\(^\text{11}\)


\(^{11}\)“Honorable Jerome C. Kearby, Full Text of His Great Speech at Greenville on June 13, 1896,” *Southern Mercury*, June 18, 1896.
Texas was not the only part of the country experiencing political and economic unrest. National Democrats, when faced with the onslaught of the Populists, seemed to adopt the attitude of, “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” in 1896. At the party national convention in Chicago, it adopted a platform that co-opted several key planks of the Populists’ Omaha Platform, including free silver, opposition to the gold standard, and a federal income tax. Meanwhile, the party chose as its presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska whose soon-to-be famous “Cross of Gold” speech at the convention was a blatant appeal to farmers and working men. Texas Populists were immediately suspicious. An editorial in the *Southern Mercury* stated, “The nomination of Wm. J. Bryan…is in furtherance of a plan…to get as near the Populist position as possible and not appropriate the Omaha Platform in toto.” It further noted that the Democratic Party was willing to “endorse anything to catch votes.” As the People’s Party convention approached, editors warned, “The Populists should proceed to nominate candidates and adopt a platform just the same as though they had not made this almost successful effort to break into the Populist barnyard and take possession of the good things stacked therein.” Of Bryan specifically, the editors called him a “gifted man” in “very bad company” who should have “cut loose from political perfidy and dishonor and come out on the side of the common people.”

A few weeks later, as the People’s Party national convention approached, Texas Populists warned against selling out the party’s principles in return for a few concessions from the Democrats. These “middle of the road” Populists feared that acquiescing to such concessions would be the ruin of the party. They preferred to stick to their principles, embodied in the Omaha Platform, and go down in defeat if necessary. These being Texans, faced with uncertain

---

odds, they naturally appealed to historical precedent. The *Southern Mercury* urged “Populists everywhere, particularly in Texas, to stand by their guns and die in the last ditch….Show a bold front, and, as did your sires at the Alamo, ring out the defiant slogan: ‘Die we may, but surrender never!’” At the same time, the *Mercury* also expressed doubt in the party’s leadership, particularly its chairman Herman Taubeneck who proposed a “fusion” candidacy that would put Bryan at the top of the Populist ticket—as well as the Democratic ticket. The *Mercury* accused Taubeneck of “bossism,” political cowardice, demoralization, and of making the party a “beggar.” Texas reformers, who had left the Democratic party, started the Farmers’ Alliance, and became stalwart supporters of the People’s Party, opposed their new party’s national leadership at what became its decisive moment.13

At the People’s Party convention in St. Louis, the Texans became the most vocal opponents of fusion, and the most ardent supporters of the Omaha Platform. At one point, in the middle of a floor demonstration for Bryan, one Texan reportedly cried out, “We will not crucify the People’s Party on the cross of the Democracy [the Democratic Party].” The negative allusion to Bryan’s earlier “Cross of Gold” speech is clear in its meaning. The *Southern Mercury* congratulated the 103 Texas delegates for being “good and faithful servants” who stood up for party principles as well as party honor. They also credited the Texans with being instrumental in avoiding the adoption of the entire Democratic ticket by supporting Tom Watson of Georgia for vice president. The *Southern Mercury* editors reflected the opinion of many Texas Populists when they stated that they, “never knew a political emergency justifying a sacrifice of principle” and they “would not consent to have a crown of policy thorns pressed down on the People’s

Party brow nor sanction the crucifixion of its principles on a cross of falsehood and dishonor.”

Many Texas Populists were not inclined to reconcile with the Democratic Party.14

Nevertheless, Populist leaders’ biggest problem became shoring up the party ticket in the face of Bryan’s fusion candidacy that threatened to bleed votes to the Democrats. Some Populists were content to at least accept Bryan’s candidacy if he, in turn, accepted the Populist platform—others were not. In a letter to the Southern Mercury, W.W. Houston of Moody, Texas wrote, “I have talked to a great many Populists concerning the Bryan and Watson ticket. All but one says ‘No Watson, No Bryan!’” They would only accept Bryan as a committed Populist. Houston also expressed the sentiments of many Populists writing, “Our party is made up of Democrats and Republicans who had lost all hope of relief from either of the old parties, and a fusion with either will cause us to lose votes.” Houston went on to suggest that the party should withdraw its nomination of Bryan unless he endorsed the Populist platform. In their reply to Houston, Mercury editors wrote, “Mr. Bryan must accept the People’s Party nomination or he is not the candidate of the party, and his place must be filled by someone who will stand upon the platform and accept the trust conferred by the People’s Party.” As evidenced by the exchange, Texas Populists disaffected by the mainstream parties were not willing to forgive and forget—or accept Bryan.15

On election day in 1896, Texas voters could choose between McKinley-Hobart and the Republicans, or Bryan-Seward and the Democrats, or Bryan-Watson and the Populists. Bryan carried Texas, as a Democrat, with 284,298 votes or about 54 percent. As a Populist, Bryan received 76,926 votes. McKinley and the Republicans received 158,894 votes. The results for

---


the gubernatorial contest were more dramatic. The Democratic nominee, Charles Culberson won the election with 298,643 votes or about 55 percent of the votes. His chief rival, as there was no Republican opposition, was Jerome Kearby the Populist. Kearby received 238,325 votes—a difference of little more than 60,000. Populist leaders closely analyzed their loss at the polls. At best, the Populists had mixed results. Kearby’s ability to poll over 40 percent of the vote in a statewide election was encouraging; but fusion of the presidential ticket, as many had predicted, was a disastrous failure. Meanwhile, Kearby had captured half of the counties with black majorities, a little less than a third of those with Mexican-American majorities and more than half the counties with significant German-American voters. Urban labor also helped Populists gain over 40 percent of the vote in Texas’ seven largest cities. Populists made significant inroads in their efforts to build an effective coalition among disaffected groups such as blacks, poor white farmers, and urban labor. Democrats were thus put on notice that discontent was reaching dangerous levels. Moreover, Democrats like Neff knew they would soon have to deal with that discontent or risk losing political control. This political reality likely played a major role in Neff’s entry into politics.16

Politics were not the only source of discontent in Texas during the mid 1890s. Social discontent percolated on many levels. Neff lived in close proximity to one of its greatest voices—William Cowper Brann, publisher of the *Iconoclast*. The paper, published in Neff’s hometown of Waco, provided a “soapbox” for Brann who was a frequent critic of organized religion, corrupt politicians, and Neff’s alma mater Baylor University. Brann had a long history as an editorial writer for Texas newspapers including the *Galveston Evening Tribune*, the *Austin

---

Statesman, the San Antonio Express, the Houston Post, and the Waco Daily News. Brann first published the Iconoclast in 1891 as his own “journal of protest” using his own money, in Austin. The paper failed and Brann moved in 1894 to Waco where he revived the Iconoclast the next year. By today’s standards, Brann would probably be considered something of a “crank” or perhaps even an “equal opportunity hater.” He often targeted blacks, women, big business, and multiple religious denominations in addition to those already mentioned. But, it was probably his harangues against political and religious institutions that drew the most ire.  

In one article entitled “Poor Old Texas,” Brann compared the Texas of old to the Texas of new. He seemed to be nostalgic for the state’s simpler, more honest, more gallant frontier past as he related the tale of a train robbery in West Texas. Brann began by lamenting that “the fates have turned upon Texas an unkindly eye.” He addressed the sorry state of Texas politics as he lampooned the Democratic Party stating, “First our mighty Democratic majority slipped up on the ‘Hoggeian’ banana peel…while unfeeling Populists and Republicans jeered and flouted us.” Here Brann’s words likely resonated well with many establishment Democrats who yearned for a simpler time—when they were not bothered by political competition or demands for reform. Brann went on to imply that the people had grown soft as he recounted how in a recent train robbery, “half a hundred Texans” were “trembling at the sight of one gun.” He added, “our humiliation is accomplished, our agony is complete.” Brann concluded, “The fair ladies of other lands will no longer worship us as the picturesque knights of a reckless chivalry. They will remember that in a whole trainload of Texans, there was not one who would fight.” Brann’s view of a modern state of ignoble and bumbling politicians and spineless citizenry cannot have

pleased proud Texans. If anything, here Brann was consistent in his ability to offend or alienate multiple targets at the same time.\textsuperscript{18}

Brann extended his discourse on the new order of things in a piece entitled “The New South.” He began by noting that one of America’s chief faults is its “propensity to brag.” Brann elaborated, “In no section of this land of the alleged free and home of the ‘ism’ does the blowhard blow longer and louder than in the South.” Brann also noted the role of the Civil War as he wrote, “In the mad tempest of battle the New South was born; the crash of arms was the groans of maternity, the deluge of blood her baptismal rite.” He noted the great social and economic changes wrought adding, “the war swept away the curse that was our weakness, Negro slavery” and “tore the cursed fetters of caste and custom from the minds of the whites.” Furthermore these changes had “made labor respectable and progress possible.” Toward the end of the piece, Brann could not himself resist demonstrating “blowhard” propensities as he wrote, “The war is long past. We fought and lost. Our…foe extended to us a brother’s hand.” He lamented that “reconstruction pains” were to be “expected” but they were “unnecessarily severe” because of Northern misunderstanding of “us and our wards.” He concluded that the blood of “stern Puritans” and “dashing Cavaliers” would “homogenize” and the resulting America would make the “world stand agaze.” Brann’s commentary here is quite interesting. Some of the more patriotic types were probably offended by his assertion of the “alleged” nature of American freedom. Others may have been equally offended by his reference to “isms.” Few would have contradicted Brann’s concessions about Reconstruction, but in a period in which the Old South

was romanticized and Bourbon Democrats resisted social and economic change, there was much to dislike.19

Brann saved his sharpest, most satirical, commentary for organized religion—especially clergymen. In one article, the author related the story of how while reviewing a report of a recent meeting of the Dallas Pastors’ Association, he was interrupted by a knock at the door. There he found a “Jewish type” man of about thirty years of age with “unkempt hair,” a beard, “clothed in a single garment,” and wearing no shoes. Brann, of course, invited him in and offered him a beer. Upon imbibing, Brann’s guest remarked, “This is very refreshing, will it intoxicate?” The host replied that it would make one intoxicated “some” but that it was “not the wild-eyed, murderous mania peculiar to Prohibition booze.” The guest had only one glass so as not to “abuse the good things in life.” At this point Brann’s guest reached into a dry, leather pouch and removed a crusty, moldy piece of bread. Brann, upon seeing this cried, “Jesus Christ! You don’t eat that do you?” The guest rose startled and said, “You know me then? Yes it is I—Jesus of Nazareth…behold the nail prints…the spear wound…the scars…upon my brow.” Yes, Jesus apparently had a “Come to Brann” meeting with the Iconoclast publisher.20

Jesus revealed to Brann that he had attended the aforementioned meeting of the Dallas Pastors’ Association in which the main topic was no less than “The Second Coming of Christ.” The meeting was attended by some of the city’s and state’s most prominent pastors; Brann, of course, named names. Thankfully, Jesus had “not come as yet to judge the world” as the pastors had him sweeping the room and made him stand in the hallway as they completed their meeting. Jesus bemoaned, “I have suffered and sacrificed much for this people, and it has borne so little fruit. Here and there among the simple poor, I find traces of the truths I taught…but the

19Ibid., 161-3.
20Ibid., 70-80.
shepherds do not keep my sheep.” So, some of the most godly men in Texas did not even recognize their savior and even rejected him. Upon hearing Jesus’ story, Brann remembered how Jesus had initially ministered to the poor and un-pious only to be denounced as a “wine bibber and glutton by the Prohibitionists and other Miss Nancys of Palestine.” At this point, Brann took Jesus to what could only have been a saloon to “get some grub.” There Jesus was received warmly by the patrons who included a “quartet of Texas colonels” sipping mint juleps. Jesus asked Brann if the patrons were sinners; Brann replied that prohibitionists would consider them as such. Jesus was confused by what he saw, as no doubt were many Texans who saw social, economic, and political discord all around.21

Later, Brann awoke in his office only to realize the whole incident had never happened; it was just a dream. In the course of his story, Brann spoke of several well-known and respected clergymen and politicians. These included Baptist preacher, and former Baylor financial secretary John B. Cranfill as well as Governor Charles A. Culberson. Brann’s portrayal of some of Texas’ finest citizens was considerably less than flattering. More importantly, his implication that they were far less than godly was probably disturbing and insulting to many Texans—much less to his targets. Many would have thought the notion of the son of God coming to visit someone like Brann blasphemous. As Brann had stated, the entire incident was a “dream,” accusations of blasphemy may have been lessened, but the use of Jesus’ name and the way in which it was used, for political and social satire, cannot have been appreciated by largely church-going Texans. Nonetheless, most of Brann’s readers probably enjoyed the satire and found some truth in the portrayal; this is what enabled him to sell papers. Brann’s and the Iconoclast’

21 Ibid.
success was itself indicative of a level of discontent with public figures of the time. But, Brann’s willingness to take on respected figures, both clerical and secular, was ultimately dangerous.\textsuperscript{22}

By late 1897, Brann’s antireligious and anti-Baylor rhetoric began to catch up with him as a result of his remarks related to a scandal involving the unwed pregnancy of a fourteen year old Brazilian girl under the care of Baylor University President, Rufus Burleson. Baptist missionaries had brought the girl to Baylor to be educated. The young lady in question was also a member of Burleson’s household and allegedly became pregnant by the brother of the university president’s son-in-law. In the course of the scandal, Brann expressed the hope that the university would take care that no more “young ladies” or “wards of the Baptist Church” should be “debauched.” Unfortunately, the baby died and the girl left Baylor. Many Baylor supporters believed that Brann had questioned the virtue of the school’s female student body. Others disapproved of Brann’s implication that Baylor could not adequately protect female students. Brann later assured the school’s women students that “this controversy does not in the least concern you,” and that “the \textit{Iconoclast} has never questioned your good virtue.” Still others no doubt disapproved of Brann’s airing of Baylor’s, and its president’s, dirty laundry. Despite Brann’s conciliatory words about the virtue of Baylor’s female students, many Baylor supporters were not satisfied.\textsuperscript{23}

On October 2, 1897, Brann was kidnapped by a group of students and taken onto the Baylor campus where he was “asked” to retract his statements about the university and leave Waco. Four days later, Brann who had still not left town, was beaten by a local judge and two others. Brann refused to back-down or modify his views. The publisher directly addressed the

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.

situation in the *Iconoclast* in an article all too aptly titled, “Brann vs. Baylor, Revolvers, Ropes, and Religion.” Brann’s negative views of Baptists and Waco was immediately apparent as he wrote, “One cannot write philosophic essays while dallying with the Baptist faith….Here in Waco, our religious zeal registers 600 in the shade….We believe with Saint Paul that faith without works is dead; hence we gird up our loins…grab our guns and go whooping forth…for Christ.” Brann then directed his rage at his oppressors and their ignorance writing, “These intellectual eunuchs, who couldn’t father an idea if cast bodily into the goddess of wisdom, declared positively that I would not be permitted to print nothing more about their beloved Baylor” or they “were willing to sign Brann’s death warrant.” He acknowledged that he knew of “at least half a dozen” who were “awaiting the opportunity to assassinate me.”

Brann also used the pages of the *Iconoclast* to address his supporters. The publisher referred to the “thousands of letters” sent to the paper many of which were concerned about efforts to “forcibly suppress” Brann and the *Iconoclast*. He thanked his supporters for their “kindly interest” as well as those Texas cities that had offered to give the paper and its editor “asylum.” Brann refused such charity as he wrote, “My forebears helped make Texas a republic; they helped make it a state….I like the climate, and most of the people, and am in no hurry to move.” He added, “If I do move…it will be bruited throughout the universe that I was driven out of Waco…just as I was driven out of San Antonio…but that won’t worry me….I’ve been lied about so damn much.” Later, Brann let his bravery flag a little as he conceded, “I’ve been kept so badly frightened by threats to drag me out of my home and hang me…that I’ve been unable to write anything worth reading.” Brann then got his courage back as he vowed, “I will grab the

---

English language by the butt-end and make it crack like a new bull-whip about the ears of hypocrites and humbugs.” Thus Brann refused to be cowed by his opponents.25

It did not take long to bring the conflict between Brann and his supporters and Baylor’s supporters to a violent conclusion. A month after Brann’s kidnapping, Judge G.B. Gerald, a supporter of Brann, and brothers J.W. and W.A. Harris, supporters of Baylor, were involved in a gunfight in the streets of Waco. The judge survived but lost an arm, while the brothers were both killed. Some five months later, in April of 1898, Brann himself became a target. The impromptu gunfight occurred in downtown Waco, on South Fourth Street, near the busy Cotton Belt Railroad ticket office. Brann was shot in the back on one of Waco’s main thoroughfares by Tom E. Davis a supporter of Baylor and the father of two female students at the university. Brann was able to return fire and “shot to kill.” Both men were shot through the lung and died shortly after the duel. The two men were at the time on opposite sides of a city election—but of course the main issue was the virtue of the Davis girls. A few days later, the city of Waco bore witness to the surreal spectacle of dual, simultaneous, funerals each attended by opposing sides in an on-going sociopolitical battle royal. Brann’s rhetoric had finally caught up with him. Waco’s position as a nexus of sociopolitical struggle was duly established; its capacity for violent suppression of dissent was also demonstrated.26

Many years later, a journalist contacted Neff about Brann. Apparently Neff had been “acquainted” with Brann but little more than that. It is obvious that anyone living in Waco during Brann’s time there would have been familiar with his exploits and demise which were symptomatic of the discord of the time. This was the Texas of Pat Neff’s young adulthood.

---

25Ibid., 183-4.
During most of the 1890s, the future governor was getting an education receiving his bachelor’s degree from Baylor in 1894. For the next two years, the future governor taught school in Magnolia, Arkansas, after which he attended law school at the University of Texas from which he graduated in 1898. During Neff’s time in Austin, he demonstrated a budding interest in the politics of the day often attending sessions of the legislature. Neff also made important political connections having attended law school with Governor Hogg’s son. Following graduation, Neff returned to Waco to start a law practice and married his longtime sweetheart “Myrtie” Mainer and started a family. In 1898, Neff also began his political life by running for and winning election to the state legislature to represent McLennan County—just two years after the Populist’ Revolt and shortly after the death of Brann.27

The volatile politics and energetic economy of Texas in the decade prior to the collapse of the Populist Revolt would have had a profound effect on anyone entering politics at the time. For a young Southern Progressive like Neff, the need to maintain social and political order while diversifying and growing the state’s economy would have been overpowering. The task was made all the more difficult by the growing numbers of disaffected blacks, poor white farmers, and urban laborers. The challenge was whether to answer the many demands of the disaffected or to minimize them entirely. In either case, Neff learned the necessity of maintaining a peaceful balance between conservatives and reformers—especially among their more radical members. Meanwhile, Neff’s experience with the political and social climate of his native Waco was

27Neff to Charles Selecman, July 3, 1936, (Pat M. Neff Papers. Texas Collection. Baylor University. Waco, Texas [Hereinafter cited as PNP.]); From the time of my initial research for a Master’s Thesis, and subsequent research for this dissertation, the Pat M. Neff Papers were re-arranged for the purpose of digitizing the collection. That process was ongoing during my research. Therefore, box and file numbers have been omitted here as they would most likely be incorrect. Baylor University’s Texas Collection plans on making the collection available electronically in the next few years. I am greatly indebted to the collection’s archivists for allowing me such unusual access.; Thomas E. Turner, "NEFF, PAT MORRIS," Handbook of Texas Online, accessed February 07, 2011, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fne05; Neff to Ben Neff, PNP, January 24, 1897.
highly influential in his overall political philosophy. The episode with Brann and the *Iconoclast*
revealed the extent to which the city was a social and political powder keg that, in all likelihood,
was representative of the rest of the state. Neff railed against episodes of “lawlessness” and
disorder for the rest of his life especially while governor. The episode also revealed the
influence of religion in politics. Neff was in and out of politics for some fifty years during most
of which he served Baylor University, a Baptist institution, in some capacity. Nevertheless, Neff
often spoke of the need to maintain a separation between church and state and of the supremacy
of secular institutions in public life. Neff carried all of these lessons with him for the rest of his
life.
CHAPTER 4
NEFF AS SPEAKER OF THE TEXAS HOUSE

Any voter who is subject to pay a poll tax under the laws of the State of Texas shall have paid said tax before he offers to vote at any election in this State, and hold a receipt showing the payment of his poll tax before the 1st day of February next preceding such election.

--The General Election Law of 1903
(Terrell Election Law), Section 2

When Pat M. Neff entered the Texas legislature in 1899, Democrats were greatly preoccupied with the need to limit political insurgency as well as to preserve their political hegemony. To do this, they sought passage of an amendment to the Texas Constitution that required payment of the poll tax for voting in 1901. In the 1903 session, the legislature passed the “Terrell Election Laws” which affected every aspect of voting including payment of poll taxes, registration, campaigning, primary elections, and general elections. Together, these laws greatly restricted the size of the electorate as well as strengthened the Texas Democratic Party by virtually eliminating the possibility of effective political opposition. This legislation was largely a response to the Populist Revolt of the 1890s, which drew great support in Texas. The People’s Party drew the support of various disaffected segments of the electorate such as poor white farmers, urban labor, and African-Americans. The Populists bi-racial stance particularly incensed Texas conservatives. The movement had reached its climax in 1896 with the “fusion” candidacy of William Jennings Bryan for president on both the Democratic and People’s Party tickets. Bryan of course split his own vote and threw the election to Republican William McKinley but garnered a huge percentage of the total vote under the two party banners. Texas Democrats, like Neff, finally realized the danger posed by Populists to their own political
domination and sought to limit it. Franchise restriction, in the form of the poll tax, and “electoral
reform,” under the guise of the Terrell election laws, was the result. Neff, who served as both a
state legislator from McLennan County and later as Speaker of the Texas House of
Representatives, played a crucial role in the passage of this legislation in the period between
1898 and 1903.¹

By the 1890s, the Peoples Party and the Texas Farmers’ Alliance had made serious
inroads into state politics. Much of this was the result of a prolonged agricultural depression that
had greatly stricken Southern farmers. This depression, in conjunction with the crop-lien system,
resulted in widespread debt and insolvency that turned yeoman farmers into tenant farmers and
tenant farmers into sharecroppers. In effect, it made landholders into farmhands. The resulting
disaffection caused many to leave the Democratic Party fold to support the populists. The
People’s Party appealed to farmers chiefly because of its calls for a crop subtreasury, “free”
silver, and paper currency—all of which were designed to bring cheaper credit and higher farm
commodity prices. The party also appealed to broader interests with such proto-progressive
policies as the passage of antitrust legislation, a graduated income tax, the popular election of
United States Senators, and election reforms such as primaries. As is always the case with third-
party politics in the United States, the key to success for the Populists was building a winning
coalition. Many People’s Party leaders actively sought African-American participation in the
organization.²

¹For a general discussion of the Populist Revolt, and its ramifications in the South, see C. Vann Woodward,
Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), Chapter Nine; For
more Texas specific information on the revolt, see: Alwyn Barr, Reconstruction to Reform, Chapters Seven and Ten;
For more on the ramifications of the Poll Tax, see V.O. Key, Southern Politics in State and Nation, Chapter Twenty-
eight.

²Greg Cantrell and D. Scott Barton, “Texas Populists and the Failure of Biracial Politics,” The Journal of
Southern History, 55, November 1989, 659-60; See also Gaither, Gerald H. Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots
and Bigotry in the “New South” (University: University of Alabama Press, 1977); Gaither’s work is a wider
treatment of biracial politics within the Populist movement. Cantrell’s and Barton’s work is an excellent Texas
In courting African-American voters, Populists faced several challenges. The first of these was simply wooing African-Americans, who were reluctant to abandon allegiance to the Republican Party that had freed them. In some isolated areas, African-American Republicans constituted enough of a political force to discourage many whites from deserting the establishment Democratic Party for the Populists lest they risk African-American office holding. Gaining the support of poor white farmers in North and East Texas was relatively easy. Populists merely needed to convince them that their already desperate financial plight was unlikely to improve under Democratic rule. Meanwhile, Populists needed to appear to offer African-Americans enough political equality to attract them, but not enough to scare whites. Obviously, the biggest obstacle to forming the biracial coalition the People’s Party needed for electoral success was the racial attitudes of the day and good-old-fashioned white supremacy. By opening the political front door to African-Americans, the Populists also opened the door to white supremacy—which could be used as a weapon against them.³

The People’s Party reached the zenith of its political influence in Texas in 1896. The gubernatorial race between Populist Jerome C. Kearby and Democrat Charles Culberson was uncomfortably close for Democrats. Culberson won the election—but Kearby polled an amazing forty-four percent of the electorate. Clearly Texas Democrats had reason to fear for their previously unquestioned political hegemony. The net result was the strengthening of the Progressive wing of the Texas Democratic Party, which moved to bring former Populists back into the fold by co-opting the People’s Party agenda wherever possible. By this time, the patriarch of Texas’ reform Democrats was James S. Hogg, who was governor from 1891 to 1895. As governor, Hogg introduced reforms such as railroad and insurance regulation designed

to stem the flow of support away from the Democratic Party. After the collapse of the Populists, Hogg and company moved swiftly to rebuild the coalition of businessmen, professionals, and farmers that had formed the basis of Democratic support. In 1900, the “Hogg Amendments” suggested a series of reforms that targeted the railroads. These included prohibiting insolvent companies from operating in the state and outlawing the use of corporate funds in state politics among other things. Such reforms were particularly popular with farmers, who depended on the railroads to ship crops. More importantly, Progressives under Hogg moved to limit the likelihood of political insurgency such as the Populist revolt.4

Electoral “reform” was a key to limiting such insurgency. In Texas, this took the form of the poll tax and the uniform direct primary. The man most closely associated with the poll tax and electoral reform in Texas is Alexander Watkins Terrell, who first suggested the poll tax as a means to restrict black suffrage as a state senator in 1879 during the Sixteenth Texas Legislature. During his tenure in the Texas Senate, Terrell consistently sought to reduce the political power and influence of Texas’s African-American population. Terrell cast the poll tax as a means not only to roll back the social and political effects of Reconstruction in the state following Redemption but also to raise needed revenue. The measure passed in the Senate but failed in the House partly due to the perception that the proposed law would affect not only blacks but also poor whites neither of whom could likely afford to pay the tax. It was only after the Populist revolt of the 1890s that Texas politicians reevaluated the efficacy of making payment of the poll tax mandatory for the right of suffrage. Obviously, the prospect of disfranchisement of poor

---

white farmers who had been “disloyal” to the party during the Populist Revolt was now a viable option to Texas Democrats seeking reassert their political control.  

Neff, a “Hogg man” through and through, began his quest to represent the people of the city of Waco and McLennan County in the Texas House of Representatives in 1898. In these off-year elections, the people of Texas, and no doubt the rest of the nation, were mostly preoccupied by the buildup for and outbreak of the Spanish American War. Newspaper coverage of Neff’s campaign in the *Waco Times Herald* was scant. Nevertheless, the paper did reprint one of candidate Neff’s campaign stump speeches given in McGregor, Texas, approximately one week prior to the Democratic primary. In the speech, Neff made several statements that are both indicative of the political times but, more importantly, reflected both his allegiance to the Democratic Party and his desire to appeal to former Populists. Neff began his speech by appealing to the party faithful with an affirmation “I am a Democrat….I believe in the policies, the purposes, the platform, and principles advocated and maintained by my party.” Neff specifically addressed the issue of the Democrats’ opponents—the Republicans, not the Populists. He noted, “Republicanism elevates the state above the citizen” whereas “Democracy [the Democratic Party] bids citizens to stand upright and be fearless, a freeman born of freemen, sturdy in his own strength, loyal to his state, earnest in his allegiance.” Thirty-three years after the end of the Civil War, one has to wonder what Neff meant by “freemen” born of “freemen.” Furthermore, one might also wonder whether Neff was calling for loyalty and earnest allegiance to the state—or to the Democratic Party.  

---


6 “Honorable Pat M. Neff”s McGregor Speech,” *Waco Times Herald* (hereinafter cited as *WTH*), May 1, 1898.
In spite of any jibes made by the candidate toward Populist “turncoats,” Neff made several statements in his speech that would have appealed to them. One such statement was on “free silver,” a subject near and dear to former Populists. When referring to the upcoming election of a new United States Senator for Texas, candidate Neff noted that the new senator should be “a man who has an unswerving faith in bimetallism and who has been taught to fight monometalism as Hannibal was taught to fight Rome.” Neff also spoke on the topic of property taxes, which would have been very important to poor yeoman farmers. He stated, “Equality in taxation is the golden thread that runs through the fabric of this republic….I do not believe that any class of people should be forced to pay a heavy tax in order to fill the pockets of others. Economy should be practiced…to lighten the burden of taxation.” Neff also expressed belief in the need to develop the state’s industrial economy as he promised to “advocate every measure…to foster a home market for the produce of our people” and to provide “wider and nobler opportunities for the toiling millions.” On the topic of education, Neff declared himself the “staunch and unswerving friend of education from the kindergarten to the state university.” In this part of the speech Neff’s progressive views toward efficient government, economic development, and education are evident. Also evident are Neff’s abilities as a politician and party leader. Clearly, Neff did his part in trying to bring former Populists back to the Democratic Party fold—something that would not have gone unappreciated by Hogg and his people.7

The most interesting, and telling, part of Neff’s speech was on the topic of “ballot box reform.” The candidate noted, “The ballot box which should be the palladium of purity, has…become Pandora’s box, out of which has leaped the political and social evils that thwart the

7Ibid.
will of people.” Whether Neff was talking about the “will” of all of the people, or just Democrats is not known. Nevertheless, Neff’s next statement was very interesting as he warned that “the only safety for our government and institutions lies in checking the unbridled and unregulated right of voting [author’s italics].” Today, in an age when most generally agree that rights should not be bridled, regulated, or infringed upon in any way, this seems strange even blatantly arrogant. In Neff’s time, poll taxes were a largely accepted means of raising revenues for schools and African-Americans were already largely disfranchised. To many who listened to the speech, or read it, its true meaning and possible consequences were probably obscured by complacency, the rhetoric itself, or the mindset of the day.8

Neff went on to suggest several ways through which the “purity” of the ballot could be obtained. All of these amounted to some form of franchise restriction. They included “educational” and “property” qualifications. Neff also noted, “Several of the Southern states have made the registration of the poll tax receipt a prerequisite to the right to cast a ballot.” Neff added, “This has proven to be a good law and seems to me should be enacted into the laws of Texas.” For good measure Neff also noted “this will not only purify the ballot box, but will put hundreds and thousands of dollars into the school funds.” The candidate closed his comments on the necessity of ballot box reform by warning that good citizens should expect to do their part to perform civic responsibilities. Neff said, “a privilege is conferred a duty is implied. If Texas citizens are accorded the privilege of suffrage [author’s italics], it is their imperative duty to pay something to the government under whose protecting wing they live.” Here Neff let slip his true

8Ibid.
opinion; voting is not a right, it is a privilege—for which good, industrious citizens should be willing and able to pay. 9

About a week later, following the Democratic primary in McLennan County, the Waco Times Herald declared Neff “elected to the legislature.” With no real competition, the November election was a mere formality. The following January, Neff went to Austin. The freshman representative from McLennan County enjoyed committee postings such as the Judiciary Committee, a good assignment, and the Town and City Corporations Committee, which was not necessarily important but was busy in rapidly growing Texas. As the session approached, the press speculated over the issues that might dominate its legislative deliberations. Chief among them was anti-trust legislation aimed mainly at the railroads and championed by the Hogg reformists. Another major issue was a proposition to call a constitutional convention. The appropriations bill to fund the needs of the state for the next two years also promised to be contentious. The session clearly had important topics to address. One proposed piece of legislation went largely unnoticed by the state press—a change to Texas’ poll tax law to make its payment mandatory. Newly sworn State Representative Neff apparently wasted little time in making his way to the hopper. Two days into the session, Neff introduced House Joint Resolution Number One in the Twenty-Sixth legislature of the State of Texas. The resolution proposed to “amend Section 1 of Article 6 of the Constitution of the state…providing for the payment of the poll tax as a prerequisite to the right of suffrage.” Representative Neff was the sole sponsor. The proposal was read into the record and referred to the Committee on Constitutional Amendments. It drew little if any notice in the press.10

__________________________
9 Ibid.
The Texas House of Representatives went about its business. Much of its debate centered on the issue of calling a constitutional convention. Frank P. Powell, Chairman of the Committee on Constitutional Amendments, expressed the sentiment that the state needed a new document similar to the federal document that would not require frequent amendment. Powell stated, “The continual changes of laws to meet experimental whims is one of the main troubles of our great state.” Powell expressed the opinions of many who felt the Texas Constitution was antiquated and cumbersome. Still others opposed calling a constitutional convention—among them former Governor Hogg leader of the Progressive Democrats. Many among Hogg’s supporters feared that “those who have axes to grind” and “the railroads and other corporations” would dominate such a convention. No doubt, they also feared debate over a constitutional convention might detract from their anti-trust bills. All of the controversy caused the session to drag on as members looked like “cattle milling.” Even after further time was granted for consideration of it, Neff’s resolution died at the end of the regular session of the Twenty-Sixth legislature.11

State Representative Neff, after being re-elected, returned when the Twenty-Seventh Legislature convened in January of 1901. Some observers noted the conservative mood of the legislators giving them the supposed motto of “Let Texas Alone” and noting that a “minimum of law making is demanded.” Observers also noted that the “demand for ‘reform’ is no longer heard.” On the third day of the session, Neff enjoyed an honor that soon became frequent as Speaker R. E. Prince handed him the gavel and gave him the Speaker’s Chair. Perhaps this is the

of Texas, Regular Session of the Twenty-Sixth Legislature (Austin: Gamel’s Books, 1899), 43; There is no indication whether Neff was acting on his own, in concert with others, or merely trying to curry favor with higher ups. In subsequent sessions, Neff was clearly aligned with Hogg reformers, as was A.W. Terrell as will be discussed later.

reason Neff was not quite as quick at getting to the hopper with his poll tax resolution. Neff became a co-sponsor of House Joint Resolution Number Four along with three other representatives. The resolution proposed to “prohibit from voting all persons subject to the payment of State and county poll taxes, and who shall be delinquent in the payment of such taxes for either of the two years preceding.” This fine-tuning of Neff’s earlier proposal, in the previous legislature, thus required payment of the poll tax not only for the year in which a citizen wished to vote but for the two years previous to it. The legislature’s apparent conservative mood did not bode well for those who valued equal access to the vote.\textsuperscript{12}

In the meantime, the Twenty-Seventh Legislature prepared to elect Texas’s new United States senator. The leading contender for the post was the highly controversial Joseph Weldon Bailey of Gainesville in Cooke County. Bailey, an attorney, was prone to violent behavior and was closely associated with big business, particularly oil. Generally, Bailey was a member of the Texas Democratic Party’s conservative wing—and unpopular with the party’s reform wing. Bailey’s nomination quickly became mired in charges that he had illegally represented the Waters-Pierce Oil Company, which was connected to the Standard Oil Company and eventually expelled from Texas for anti-trust violations. The allegations amounted to a battle over Bailey’s nomination to the Senate and resulted in a House investigation. Here Neff played a leading role, presiding over the House as it deliberated over organization of a special committee charged with investigating the allegations against Bailey. Judge David McFall, Bailey’s chief antagonist, charged that he had worked for Waters-Pierce to aid its return to Texas. Finally, McFall got to the heart of the matter as he admitted that the only “practical reason” for the investigation was to

\textsuperscript{12}"Let Texas Alone,” \textit{DMN}, January 13, 1901; “Twenty-Seventy Legislature,” \textit{WTH}, January 11, 1901; \textit{Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Texas, Regular Session of the Twenty-Sixth Legislature}, 56;” It is common practice to allow junior representatives to preside over the House for the purposes of gaining experience and identifying potential party leaders.
“ascertain whether Mr. Bailey was a proper man to send to the United States Senate.”

Eventually, the House established the committee to investigate Bailey and found nothing unethical about his actions and he was sent to the Senate. In effect, Bailey was “acquitted” though these charges would haunt him a few years later.\(^\text{13}\)

In electing Bailey to the Senate, the conservative and reform Democrats set aside their differences long enough to perform their duty as prescribed by the United States Constitution. Only four members of the House voted against Bailey. The new senator, known for his oratorical skills, rose to the occasion as he addressed the legislature in thanks for his newly gained position. In the course of Senator Bailey’s acceptance speech he chose to address the one issue upon which both wings of the Texas Democratic Party could agree—the need to consolidate the party’s base in the wake of the Populist Revolt. Bailey spoke on a conciliatory note, “I advise no bitterness, no strife…I welcome everyman and every creed who will come in and help rescue this Republic from the perilous situation into which our enemies have led it.” Then Bailey mentioned the Populists directly as he noted that he had gone “into the highways and byways of the State and begged our misguided Populist friends to come back” as he “stood at the threshold of the Democratic home and extended them a cordial and sincere welcome back.” Bailey, no doubt expressing the fears of many Democrats, then warned errant Populists against joining the Republicans, noting they can “never feel at home” there. He added “There is no falling from grace with the true Democrat.” Of these “errant” Populists and would-be Republicans, Bailey said, “Let us forgive him…that came back and forget that they ever went

away.” Clearly, there was a sentiment among Texas legislators to bring the Populists back into the fold whether through rapprochement or other means.\textsuperscript{14}

In spite of the conciliatory rhetoric, Texas Democrats had another tool at their disposal to enable them to maintain their political power and minimize, if not eliminate, the Populist and Republican threats. On March 6, 1901, after its acceptance by the House, Speaker Prince signed a Senate version of the poll tax resolution. This action sent the proposed amendment of the Texas Constitution to the voters in November 1902. Initially, there was little notice of the suggested changes to Texas’s election laws in the state press. When there was mention of the poll tax amendment, newspapers frequently favored making it mandatory. Many cited the loss of tax revenue as a major reason for requiring its payment. In an editorial in the \textit{Austin Daily Statesman}, the paper cited statistics given by Dallas County Tax Assessor Epps G. Knight, who reported that in 1899 his county had 162,624 “insolvent,” or unpaid, polls. According to Knight this represented $243,926 in unpaid school taxes and a loss of $40,656 in revenue to the county. In a statement that indicates the level of acceptance of the tax, the paper noted that “the fact that a poll tax is levied at all is proof quite sufficient that the state considers it a just tax.” Its editors concluded that to “require a voter to show that he has paid his poll tax six months or a year before an election in which he seek the exercise of suffrage would constitute sufficient penalty to effect the larger collection of so just and essential a tax.” No one seemed to notice that if the tax were made mandatory it had the possibility of disfranchising thousands of citizens of Dallas County—let alone the rest of the state.\textsuperscript{15}

The Bonham News scored a virtual editorial coup in securing the opinion of the grand old man of suffrage restriction himself—Alexander W. Terrell. The editors wrote, “We are certain we could not use our editorial space today for a better purpose than to present the views of Judge A. W. Terrell.” Terrell’s views were stated plainly when he noted, “Give Texas a pure ballot; give her this and all of the needed reforms will quickly follow….We must place the elective franchise in the hands of those only who appreciate a free government….The lazy and depraved element of every race, who will not pay even a poll tax for education, must be kept from the ballot box.” Here, Terrell made clear that the poll tax amendment was not aimed only at blacks, but as he put it, “wandering white men, Mexicans, and vagrants.” At about the same time, J. D. Johnston, chairman of the Populist Party in Texas, reminded voters of the words of Abraham Lincoln, who warned of “surrendering a power which they already have, and which, when surrendered, will close the door of advancement to them and fix new disabilities upon them” Johnston then urged Texans to vote against the poll tax amendment. They ignored the warning.

The same electorate that approved the poll tax amendment in November 1902 also re-elected Neff to the state legislature. With him came Terrell, who had been out of the legislature for several years, to represent Travis County. In the Twenty-Eighth Legislature, both men were in prime positions to affect further electoral reform in Texas. Neff was in the best position. When he arrived in Austin in January 1903, Neff was determined to build upon his experience in the Speaker’s chair during the previous session to secure the Speakership for himself. Louis S. Schluter of Jefferson in Marion County opposed Neff in the race for the position. The race between the two men was hard-fought and, as it turned-out, represented yet another struggle for

---

control between the conservative and reform wings of the Texas Democratic Party. Both men approached the race with bravado as Schluter stated, “I have enough votes to elect me…and I have no fear of losing out. Neff replied self-assuredly to reporters, “I have eighty-four letters in my grip from members of the House who have promised to vote for me. There are 113 members in the next house, so you see that I have more than enough to win the race.”

What many in the press and in the public-at-large probably did not know was that Neff also enjoyed the support of the highly respected former Governor Hogg. By July of 1902, Neff had already enlisted Hogg’s support. Hogg wrote to Neff, “I beg to say that I would be glad to see you made Speaker.” Hogg then mentioned the possible support of an important political operative. The former Governor added, “To this end, I have endeavored to commit Judge [A.W.] Terrell to you and must say that in all probability he will be for you.” The former governor personally lobbied for Neff’s election as Speaker. In a letter to State Representative W. J. Miller of Howard County, Hogg wrote, “I should be glad for you to support Honorable Pat M. Neff for Speaker of the next House of Representatives.” Hogg added, “He is upright, clean, capable, impartial….and his sympathies are with the plain people.” Attached to the copy of Hogg’s letter to Miller was an enclosed letter from Governor Hogg to Neff. Hogg wrote, “I do hope you will succeed and make the people a first class Speaker. When I say the ‘people’ I do not mean to include the lobby.” The letter was signed “Very Truly Yours, J.S. Hogg.”

While Neff enjoyed the support of the leader of the Texas Democrats’ reform wing, Schluter enjoyed the support of the conservative wing’s most prominent politician—Senator

17“The Race for Speaker,” WTH, January 8, 1903.
18James S. Hogg to Neff, July 28, 1902, PNP; Hogg to J. Miller, Undated, PNP; Hogg to Neff, December 4, 1902, PNP; Robert C. Cotner, James Stephen Hogg: A Biography (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1959) 517; According to Cotner, Hogg “encouraged” Terrell’s efforts on election reform and suggested Tom Connally’s support of Neff for speaker. See also Worth Robert Miller. “Building a Progressive Coalition in Texas: The Populist-Reform Democrat Rapprochement, 1900-1907.” Worth Robert Miller has offered a slight treatment of this episode but does not cite the letter of July 28, 1902 from Hogg to Neff.
Bailey. Within a few days, members of the press noted that the race between Neff and Schluter was in a “fever heat.” They also noticed that the “younger contingent” seemed to be supporting Neff while the “older members” supported Schluter bearing witness to the nature of the fight between older conservatives and younger reformers. Both sides tallied committed supporters. Neff “named the names” of his supporters. Schluter disputed them and cited examples of “his” supporters that had been claimed by Neff. The night before the vote, Neff claimed seventy-three “sure votes” while Schluter was “positive of seventy votes.” The only way to find out with certainty was to have the vote. The honorable Tom Connolly of Falls County placed Neff’s name in nomination for Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives. Connolly said of Neff, “Pure as a woman in thought and act, a public man without guilt, a citizen without a blemish, elect him and send a thrill of hope through the heart of every young man is this land striving against adverse circumstances for a place in life.” Connolly also acknowledged Neff’s youth, “dignity,” and “ability” in the course of his legislative career. Neff won the vote by a margin of seventy-two to fifty-six. Ironically, many attributed Neff’s winning margin as much to Senator Bailey’s behind the scenes support of Schluter as to the new Speaker’s popularity.19

Up to this time, Wacoans had paid little attention to the doings of their state representative in Austin. On January 14, 1903, the Waco Times Herald carried a banner headline; “Pat M. Neff Won the Speakership.” The paper was one of the few to reprint Neff’s acceptance speech in which he said, “I have been placed here by the untrammeled and un-intimidated support of those who have deemed me worthy to fill it….I have no words of

criticism or revenge.” The *Times Herald* also included a tribute to and biography of Waco’s new favorite son. The paper noted that Neff was a native of McLennan County and had grown up on a farm in MacGregor near the county seat of Waco. Neff had also received most of his education in McLennan County, where he attended Baylor University and graduated with honors. The paper noted, “Mr. Neff was very popular in this city and his friends…know what difficulties he has encountered and know full well the manly campaign he has waged.” The people of the city of Waco and McLennan County were proud. They could look forward to being represented not by the vote of a lone legislator, but by the Speaker who organized the House and controlled its legislative calendar. In truth, under parliamentary rules, the Speaker rarely voted but held more than enough power to compensate for the loss of a vote. Neff wielded that power effectively to build upon the success of the poll tax in the previous session to effect greater change in the form of the “Terrell Election Laws.”

When Terrell ran for state representative in 1902, he came out of retirement to do so, at the age of seventy-five. Terrell was one of Texas’s most respected statesmen having been a personal friend of Sam Houston as well as having been appointed by President Grover Cleveland as minister to the Ottoman Empire. Clearly, he felt he had important work to do to take on such a responsibility at his age after already completing a full career. After having “purified” the ballot with the passage of the poll tax requirement, Terrell now sought to make sure that “all of the needed reforms” that he had alluded to in the interview with the editors of *The Bonham News* would indeed quickly follow—even if he had to do it himself. But, Terrell had help from Speaker Neff. In what may have been a *quid pro quo* for supporting Neff’s candidacy for Speaker, Neff used his parliamentary powers of appointment to place Terrell in the perfect

---

position to promote his electoral reform agenda. The Speaker appointed Terrell Chairman of the House Committee on Privileges, Suffrage, and Elections. For good measure, Neff also appointed Terrell to a seat on the Constitutional Amendments Committee. Thus, Neff anticipated all possible contingencies in order to maximize the possibility of further electoral reform.21

As the legislature organized itself and otherwise began to prepare for its session, Texans rushed to pay their poll taxes. The newly passed poll tax amendment called for such payments to be made by January 31, 1903. Only at this time did the true repercussions of the poll tax, and franchise restriction, begin to become apparent. Approximately ten days before the deadline, Dallas County Tax Collector H. H. Jacoby noted that somewhere “in the neighborhood of 5,000” poll tax receipts had been issued and he expected “not less than 10,000 qualified voters in the city by the night of January 31.” On the day of the deadline, editors of the Dallas Morning News reminded readers it was the “last day to pay.” The same day, one observer noted that the Dallas County Tax Collector’s Office was “more populous than a registration office in the Indian Territory during land opening.” In the next few days, county tax collectors across the state began to report poll tax payment totals. The Dallas Morning News reported that a “considerable portion of the citizens of Texas are disqualified under the law.” Officials in both Tarrant and Travis counties (Fort Worth and Austin) reported that at least fifty percent of the electorate was probably disfranchised. In Neff’s home county of McLennan, initial estimates showed that approximately thirty percent of the electorate was disfranchised. Thus, the poll tax had the desired effect for establishment Democrats—both conservatives and reformers. They now set about consolidating their gains.22


22"Poll Tax Payments,” DMN, January 21, 1903; Editorial, DMN, January 31, 1903; “Poll Tax Payments,”
On January 16, 1903, in the first week of the Twenty-Eighth legislature, Terrell submitted House Bill Number Forty-five. The bill was entitled “An Act to regulate elections and to prescribe penalties for its violation.” The record noted that the act would amend the state’s general election laws. After the bill was read into the record, it was referred to the Committee on Privileges and Elections. Four days later, Neff appointed Terrell to head that committee. Based on the bill’s description, it would seem to be rather general in nature. Instead, it amounted to a broad, sweeping change in Texas’s election laws. As passed on March 31, 1903, the “Terrell Election Laws,” as they became known, touched on nearly every aspect of the conduct of elections. They filled approximately seventeen pages of the House Journal and included 145 sections that addressed age and residence requirements, dates and times for both general elections and county primaries and conventions, and polling procedures. Many of the sections dealt specifically with administering the poll tax. Generally, counties and municipalities were responsible for collecting the taxes that were to be paid between October 1st and February 1st immediately prior to the July primary and November general elections. The law also included strict guidelines for the issuance of poll tax receipts that had to be presented to polling officials prior to voting. Whereas the mandatory poll tax passed in 1901 was designed to eliminate political participation among Blacks and poor whites, the Terrell Election laws went beyond that and were designed to allow establishment Democrats to maintain control of political discourse and power by controlling every aspect of the electoral process.23

Voter fraud, especially with respect to payment of the poll tax, was a major concern of the new laws. Some citizens, such as those over aged sixty, were exempt from paying the poll tax. Some sources claim that the new laws were a response to voter fraud, while others suggest that they were designed to limit the participation of African Americans and poor whites. Regardless of the motivation behind the new laws, they had a significant impact on the political landscape of Texas.

---

tax. They could obtain poll tax exemption certificates from their county tax collector. Those who “misplaced” their receipts could be allowed to vote upon signing an affidavit to that effect and presenting it to poll workers. However, falsification of such affidavits was punishable by three to five years in the state penitentiary. Furthermore, anyone convicted of impersonating another voter by use of their poll tax receipt could also face the same three to five year penalty. Interestingly, any election worker who failed “to keep securely any ballot box containing ballots voted at an election, when committed to his charge” could be convicted of a misdemeanor. Texas legislators were apparently more concerned with controlling who was placing ballots in the ballot box than what happened to them afterwards—this speaks volumes about their priorities and intentions.24

After passage of the Terrell Election Laws, their namesake was “greatly pleased.” In an interview with the Austin Statesman, A. W. Terrell stated that, “while the bill has been considerably weakened, it is the foundation of a law which will go far toward eradicating corrupt practices….I am deeply interested in clean elections, and this bill will give them to us.” The next evening, the House accepted a portrait of Terrell on behalf of the state “to be hung on the walls of this building” in appreciation for serving the state and nation “almost continuously for more than half a century.” The House made special mention of Terrell’s role in lawmaking through the years, and specifically referred to “some of our wisest laws” which included “our present election law.” In the session’s closing speech, Representative Bolin praised Speaker Neff for his efficiency, coolness, and “firmness of character.” Bolin added that Neff was “as stern in opinion

24Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Texas, Regular Session of the Twenty-Eighth Legislature, 1173-90, 1188.
as Napoleon; as kind and gentle as a woman.” Here, the gavel fell on the 28th regular session of
the Texas House of Representatives.25

The aftermath of Neff’s and Terrell’s work were wide-ranging and affected Texas for
decades to come. As noted by political scientist V. O. Key, the poll tax certainly kept people
from voting. The degree of truth to this varied based on a number of factors that included the
state of the economy, the socio-economic position of voters, and political interest. Key cites
1940 voting figures that indicate that of Texas citizens aged twenty-one to sixty, approximately
thirty-eight percent paid poll taxes. The median poll tax payment rate for Texas counties in 1940
was forty-five percent. Both figures are consistent with those initial rates shown by Texas’s
county tax collectors in 1903. Key notes that the poll tax “had little or no bearing on Negro
disfranchisement, the object for which it was supposedly designed.” According to Key, African-
Americans were already largely disfranchised by other means and the poll tax mostly affected
poor whites. In all likelihood, supporters of the poll tax amendment used the race issue as a
vehicle to gain voter acceptance among a largely racist electorate. Key also credits the advent of
the so-called “white primary” for further marginalizing the effectiveness of African-American
voters. Interestingly, in Texas, the “white primary,” in which white Democrats chose party
candidates prior to the county convention or primary, was largely made possible by the relative
lack of regulation of politics at the county level in the “Terrell Election Laws.” The laws
considered party primaries and conventions the province of political parties and not the state—
thus they were largely unregulated.26

25“The Election Bill Passed Finally,” AS, March 28, 1903; Journal of the House of Representatives of the
State of Texas, Regular Session of the Twenty-Eighth Legislature, 219, 257-8.

26V.O. Key, Southern Politics in State and Nation, Table 66, 612, 618.
Historian C. Vann Woodward regards suffrage restriction via a mandatory poll tax as a response by establishment Democratic politicians to the Populist Revolt—especially in Texas. According to Woodward, many people, across a broad political spectrum believed that the imposition of the poll tax requirement “would enable white men to divide freely on fundamental issues.” Thus in the case of Texas, conservatives and reformers, freed of the burden of extraneous political competition, would be able to debate freely the issues. Of course, such predictions were optimistic; the two factions often fought bitterly after 1903. Conservatives remained conservatives and continued to resist much reform. Eventually, the reformers became Progressives. In a sense, Texas reformers were conservative too. Woodward has noted that, “Southern progressivism generally was progressive ‘for white men only,’ and after the poll tax took its toll not all the white men were included.” Texas reformers, later Progressives, were often socially conservative. Thus, both factions of the party were able to agree on little things—like disfranchising the “unworthy” through the poll tax and insuring their success in doing so through “electoral reform.”27

Together, Neff and Terrell played leading roles in bringing franchise restriction to Texas via the mandatory poll tax and the Terrell Election laws. They and the legislature were able to counter the Populist and African-American “threat” through disfranchisement. In doing so, they allowed the conservative and reform wings of the Texas Democratic Party to focus on their own political differences without interference from “pesky” third parties such as African-Americans, poor white farmers, Republicans, or Populists. Generally, Terrell is most closely associated with the notion of using a poll tax requirement as a means of suffrage restriction. Terrell is perhaps better described as its most consistent champion having first suggested it in 1879. At the time of

---

the passage of the poll tax requirement, Terrell was not even in the legislature. In reality, Neff was instrumental in gaining passage of the legislation during the Twenty-seventh legislature after either sponsoring or co-sponsoring the measure in two consecutive sessions. When Terrell re-entered the legislature, he made electoral reform a major goal. Neff used his powers as Speaker of the House to help Terrell do this by placing him in key committees. Neff’s role in the passage of the poll tax requirement, electoral reform in the guise of the so-called “Terrell Election Laws,” has been largely overlooked by historians.

The fact that Neff, a Progressive, and Terrell, a conservative, worked together on election reform is very much indicative of how both wings of the party joined forces to preserve power. Conservatives like Terrell wished to maintain control of political discourse because they had always had it; Progressives like Neff wished to not only gain and maintain political control, but also to preserve social order. Furthermore, Neff’s position as a Southern Progressive is evident in his apparent willingness to reinforce Jim Crow by limiting Black political participation. In the final analysis, passage of the mandatory poll tax was merely the beginning of Texas Democrats’ efforts to regain control of the political agenda. The Terrell Election laws constituted a comprehensive revision of electoral laws designed to insure their continued control of political discourse. Neff played a major role in the passage of this legislation. The repercussions affected Texans for years to come; the poll tax requirement and many of the Terrell Election laws remained on the books until its reversal by the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965.
CHAPTER 5

PROGRESSIVES, PROHIBITIONISTS, AND THE GOVERNOR’S MANSION

There was once in this land of the free and home of the brave a legalized institution called the saloon. The business of the saloon was to sell intoxicating beverages that stole away the brains of men….It corrupted the ballot box, commercialized vice, brutalized civilization, and squandered the world’s wealth. It wrecked more homes, bribed more courts, defied more laws, and caused more tears and blood to be shed than any other institution legalized by man.

--Pat M. Neff

Through the years, Neff gave many speeches in support of prohibition. The excerpt above is a stock piece that was included in at least two of Neff’s speeches. One opening the campaign to bring county wide prohibition to McLennan County in 1917, which he led, and the other was part of a speech Neff made before a national meeting of the Anti-Saloon League in Washington D.C. After completing his tenure as Texas Speaker of the House in 1905, Neff took about a decade break from state politics to be near his young family—his daughter, Hallie Maude, was just four years old, and son Pat Jr. was two. In the interim, Neff served as assistant county attorney and county attorney for McLennan County from 1903 to 1912 and then went into private practice until 1919. Though Neff concentrated on his life and work in Waco during this time, the broader issue of prohibition increasingly drew his attention during the 1910s. By 1914, Neff was thinking of re-entering state politics and was in contact with key prohibitionists. During 1916 and 1917, two turbulent years in Texas political history, Neff was able to avoid being tainted by or otherwise associated with a vicious Texas Democratic Party convention in 1916 or the war between Governor James E. “Pa” Ferguson and University of Texas supporters
in 1917. That, along with his successful campaign for prohibition in McLennan County, led to Neff’s successful gubernatorial bid in 1920.¹

Prohibition was an important and highly divisive issue in Texas politics during the 1910s. Political conservatives often opposed it while religious conservatives supported it on moral grounds. Meanwhile many Progressives saw alcohol as an impediment to the improvement of society and thus favored prohibition. This situation made for strange political bedfellows. Groups such as the Texas League of Women Voters and the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs worked with, and shared membership with, the Anti-Saloon League of Texas or the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. The divisive nature of the issue also caused bitter debate between the conservative and Progressive wings of the state Democratic Party. According to historian Lewis L. Gould, “Few states offer a better opportunity for an examination of the Progressive-prohibitionist wing of the Democrats than Texas. In the ten years after 1911, the state enjoyed a deserved reputation as a bastion of reform.” Gould also notes that Texas Progressives identified liquor as a “major area in need of change” and decided to use the Democratic Party as a vehicle to effect the change. Conservatives within the party opposed its use for this purpose as well as the use of government to enforce “moral reform,” or much of anything else. Neff was among those Texas Progressives who regarded prohibition as a major reform and worked diligently to implement it. He received strong support from both progressives and prohibitionists in the 1920 gubernatorial election.²

Neff of course had to address other issues during this time. The woman suffrage movement was the other major issue for Texas Progressives in the 1910s. Neff never worked

¹Ibid; Pat Neff, “A Call to Arms,” The Battles of Peace, 305; Dorothy Blodgett et. al., The Land, The Law, and The Lord, 33, 38, 41-2.

²Lewis L. Gould, Progressives and Prohibitionists, xii-i.
directly for the cause though he likely supported, or at least, tacitly accepted it. One of Neff’s closest friends, S. Palmer Brooks, was one of the most prominent public supporters of woman suffrage in the state. Brooks was Neff’s college roommate, lifelong friend, and predecessor as president of Baylor University. At the request of the Waco Equal Suffrage Association in 1914, Brooks prepared a speech in which he postulated that extending the vote to women would increase voter support for reform, especially prohibition. Another prominent supporter of woman suffrage in Texas was University of Texas professor A. Caswell Ellis, who saw the issue in terms of equity and democracy. Ellis was the author of a widely distributed pamphlet entitled, “Why Men Need Suffrage for Women.” In many ways, Ellis was the “male face” of woman suffrage in Texas. Many years later, Ellis and Neff corresponded and reminisced fondly. Ellis remembered “with pleasure…when you and I started out.” Neff in turn remembered when “You and I cooperated…to ‘save the country.’” Neff may not have directly campaigned for the suffrage movement, but he was at least friends with the right people.

Another major concern for Progressives in Texas during the late 1910s was “Fergusonism.” Progressives opposed Governor James E. Ferguson and seemingly everything he represented which included the “liquor” interests, government corruption, and parochialism. Ferguson’s policies were the antithesis of nearly everything Progressive. His election in 1914 “stunned” Texas Progressives and prohibitionists alike who had expected their candidate, Thomas Ball to win. The loss was demoralizing but Ferguson’s opponents regrouped and continued to challenge the governor. Following Ferguson’s election, Fergusonism and Progressivism were bound to come to political blows. In 1916, prohibitionists sought to control

---

Texas’ delegation to the Democratic National Convention over any objection of the titular head of the state party, Governor Ferguson. The governor joined forces with former Senator Joseph Weldon Bailey to maintain control of the delegation. Following the convention, many Texas politicians looked for the rancor to continue in the new legislature. The following year, Ferguson made a serious political miscalculation when he de-funded the University of Texas and fired several administrators and faculty members including Ellis. The episode became known as the “university war.” Ultimately, a coalition of prohibitionists, Progressives, suffragists, and University of Texas supporters, all of whom had scores to settle, secured the impeachment of Ferguson in 1917. Historian Norman Brown calls Ferguson “the most important figure in Texas politics from 1914 to 1934.” Indeed, Ferguson and Fergusonism were major issues during much of Neff’s political career and the drama surrounding Ferguson’s administration set the stage for Neff’s election.⁴

Race relations were a perennial concern for all Texans. At best, the issue remained in the background; at worst, it moved to the foreground with a vicious, violent, vengeance. Texas had a well-known history of lynching. In addition, Neff’s adopted hometown of Waco had a reputation for “six shooter justice” dating to the assassination of radical newspaper publisher William Cowper Brann. A few years later in 1905, Sank Majors, a young African American man, was charged with raping a white woman. George W. Barcus, Neff’s law partner and political advisor, defended Majors but before the court reached a decision a mob removed him from the jail and hanged him. Few Wacoans, Black or white, spoke up about what had happened; Blacks who did were punished. By the mid 1910s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) hoped to bring an end to lynching by publicizing its

horror. Because of its reputation, Texas was one of the places the NAACP looked for a lynching to publicize. It found it in Waco in 1916. In many ways, such events foreshadowed the violent race relations of the 1920s when Neff was governor. In any case, Neff would have been well acquainted with the racial history of his home city and state as well as the general political climate.\(^5\)

When the 1910s began, Neff was working in the county attorney’s office in Waco; he held no elective office outside of the boundaries of McLennan County. Neff maintained his political contacts but any aspirations for statewide office remained largely in the background. Nevertheless, prohibition was the one issue that consistently drew his interest especially when it concerned Waco and McLennan County. In addition to his regular prosecutorial duties, Neff saw to it that local liquor laws were properly enforced. Early efforts centered on keeping saloons closed on Sundays. In 1905, city officials vowed that “the lid was on” as saloon keepers were warned they would be arrested for violating local blue laws. A couple of years later, several saloons began putting up privacy screens so that their patrons could not be viewed by passers by. Many prohibitionists sought to end the practice by city ordinance. In an overly polite, or perhaps respectful, letter to Neff, O. Paget of the Texas Brewer’s Association interceded on behalf of saloon owners, “If you will carefully consider it, there is no punishment attached to the keeping and maintaining of screens.” Of course, it was not the screens that local officials and prohibitionists wanted to remove—it was the saloons themselves. The Waco City Council had already passed an ordinance to keep saloons out of residential areas that threatened to put up to

---

thirty-five bars out of business. The screens were a side issue; the real issue was whether there would be any bars at all anywhere in the county.6

Meanwhile, County Attorney Neff began to establish his reputation for law and order. Neff threatened to “take action” against bar owners who opened illegally and even refused to give formal notice as he had “already been quoted in the press, which was sufficient notice.” In one test case, Neff sued N. Freeman, a local bar owner, for a thousand dollars for “damages under the law.” Neff later used the same tactics against several more bar owners. In August of 1908, County Attorney Neff filed to similar suits in addition to filing seventeen complaints against local saloons for violation of county liquor laws. For good measure, Neff noted that “saloons have been getting careless.” In a letter to Governor Oscar B. Colquitt, Neff discussed proceedings against local bar men operating outside the city’s saloon limits. Neff wrote, “We secured by means of investigation sufficient evidence to sustain cases against the proprietors of some twenty houses” that were selling “some sort of malt liquor.” All twenty pleaded guilty and Neff noted “more vigorous prosecutions, supplemented by the injunction suits will…, restrain them from further violations of the law.” Thus, Neff got an early reputation as a strong enforcer of liquor laws, and the law in general. That reputation served him well and only grew.7

In 1912, Neff stepped down as McLennan County attorney to return to private practice, no doubt with his eye on bigger and better things. By 1916, Neff was either thinking of running as, or was at least rumored to be, a candidate for Congress. On that basis, Arthur J. Barton, Superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League of Texas canvassed Neff and the other two


7“Warns Saloon Men to Close Waco County Attorney Will Sit on Lid,” FWST, July 10, 1907; “Tests Liquor Law Waco Saloon Man is Sued for One Thousand Dollars,” FWST, September 6, 1907; “Enforces Saloon Law,” FWST, August 9, 1908; Neff to Gov. O.B. Colquitt, June 3, 1911, PNP.
prospective candidates, Thomas McCulloch and Tom Connally, on their positions on prohibition
and liquor in general. Barton asked a series of questions the first being whether or not the
candidates were supporters of prohibition. Neff began by noting that he was “not an announced
candidate for that office” but then answered Barton’s questions anyway. Neff wrote, “…I have
since my majority always voted the prohibition ticket and have stood at all times in opposition to
the open saloon wherever found.” Neff confirmed that he also believed that the government
“had a right to suppress and prohibit in all proper and legitimate ways, the liquor traffic.”
Having answered the most important political question, Neff moved on to the next question.8

Barton also asked whether the prospective candidates were “abstainers” from alcoholic
drink. Here Neff was surprisingly honest as he responded, “I have been at all times an abstainer
from strong drinks of every kind” adding that his drinks of choice were milk or water. Then
Neff qualified the statement in what may have been his one and only “But, I didn’t inhale”
moment. With the finesse of a real politician, he revealed that there had been “the exception of
drinking one-half glass of beer” at a “semi-public” event. Neff quickly added, “my wine and
beer glasses, in public and in private, as well as in banquet halls, whether I acted as toastmaster,
host or guest, have always been turned down.” Barton further asked whether or not the
candidates had supplied alcoholic beverages to prospective voters in the course of a campaign.
This time Neff did not have to qualify his answer stating, “I am glad to say that, while I have
several times been a candidate for public office, I have never at any time, directly or indirectly,
spent one dime for any kind of intoxicating beverages for the purpose of treating voters.” Having
answered any questions about his personal experience with alcoholic beverages, Neff turned to
its more immediate political aspects by affirming his support for both state and federal

8Neff to A.J. Barton, January 19, 1916, PNP.
prohibition legislation. Neff’s answers likely were satisfactory to Barton and the Anti-Saloon League—he later made several speeches for them. Neff’s good friend, Tom Connally, went on to win the congressional seat.9

It is possible that part of the reason Neff did not run for the congressional seat is a rather uncomfortable business venture in which he was then involved. It seems that while Neff was on a trip to California, some of his business partners bought the Majestic Theater building in Waco. The building had several tenants one of which was, of all things, a saloon. Neff refused to have anything to do with the building. In a letter to one of the partners, Henry H. Shear of Waco, Neff noted he had “declined so far to do any act in regard to receiving rents or paying out money in connection with the trade.” Neff acknowledged, “It has never been my intention that anyone should suffer any loss concerning this trade.” But, he added, “I have not been able to get [sic] my consent to do any act that would indicate that I was buying a saloon or receiving rents from a saloon.” Neff asked that the property be sold and stated he would bear his “proportionate share of whatever loss,” and should there be profit, he offered “the other parties associated in the enterprise shall receive the profits.” If that were not agreeable, Neff pleaded, “I would be glad for you to submit to me the easiest and most satisfactory way for me to relieve myself from any connection whatever with this property.” After nearly a year of negotiations, Neff sold his interest in the building to at a “considerable” loss. Neff clearly wanted out of the deal likely because of the embarrassment it would cause and the damage it would do to his reputation as a prohibitionist if it became public knowledge.10

As it turned out, 1916 was an important year in Texas political history marked by the ascension and convergence of the main forces of politics at the time—the prohibition movement, 9Ibid.
10Neff to H.H. Shear, February 22, 1916, PNP; Neff to H.H. Shear, January 1917, PNP.
Fergusonism, and racial conflict. Neff was near the focal point of these forces during 1916. In May of that year, the political and social climate reached critical mass and Neff found himself amid a family crisis. Neff’s brother Ben, who ran the family farm at McGregor, Texas, lay near death suffering from pneumonia. Neff returned to the farm during the last few days of April to be with his brother whose condition was considered “precarious.” Other family members were summoned. On the night of May 1st, Ben Neff passed away survived by his mother Isabella, his brothers Pat and Sam, and sister Sammie Calvert. The Neff family farm in neighboring Coryell County was a rather large and prosperous operation. Up to his death, Sam Neff had run the farm; afterward, the job fell to Pat Neff. His family and professional life in Waco, as well as his political ambitions, meant he had little time for the farm. After Sam’s death, Neff hired a manager for the farm and employed one there for many years. Thus, the death of Sam Neff, in May of 1916, brought family responsibility for Pat Neff that likely diverted his attention from other critical events.11

Barely a week after Sam Neff’s death, McLennan County residents were shocked by the brutal murder of a local farm woman, Lucy Fryer, near Robinson, Texas, just south of Waco. Fryer had been struck in the head with a hammer. Authorities almost immediately secured the confession of Jesse Washington, a young African-American man who had been working in a nearby field. Washington was taken into custody but was not held in the McLennan County jail in order to “prevent mob violence.” The next day, McLennan County Sheriff S.S. Fleming and County Attorney John B. McNamara, announced they had obtained a full confession from Washington who had told them where to find the murder weapon—a blacksmith’s hammer. Following a search of the McLennan County Jail by a prospective mob, Fleming and McNamara

announced that Washington had been moved to the Dallas County Jail which was confirmed by Dallas County officials. Several members of the mob suggested that “a trip be made to Dallas” but this did not meet with “general approval” and the crowd went home. McNamara also announced that the grand jury would be convened to take up Washington’s case.\(^\text{12}\)

Under such ominous circumstances, events moved with dizzying rapidity. Less than a week later, Washington had been returned to Waco. After pleading guilty, Washington was sentenced to death. No sooner than the sentence was returned than an onlooker in the courtroom shouted, “Get the negro!” This was answered by a rush of people toward Washington that came with such suddenness that “officers, lawyers, and newspapermen were swept off their feet” and Washington was “secured before anyone could stop the proceedings.” The mob removed Washington from the courtroom, and the courthouse, and proceeded to Waco’s famous suspension bridge over the Brazos River to hang him. Before this came to pass, the crowd instead decided to burn Washington alive in the town square in front of city hall. Over 15,000 people witnessed the macabre spectacle including women and children. According to one account, “what was taking place was known all over town.” The charred trunk of Washington’s body was hauled up on a rope for all to see then dragged through town by men on horseback. Afterward, Washington’s remains were taken to nearby Robinson, the scene of Fryer’s death, and then returned to Waco where more onlookers hoped to catch a glimpse of the remains at the undertaker’s.\(^\text{13}\)

Initially, the Washington lynching received spotty news coverage—at least in Texas. One of the strongest reactions in the state came from the editors of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*


\(^{13}\)”15,000 See Waco Lynching Negro Taken out of Courtroom by Mob and Burned,” *FWST*, May 15, 1916; “Jesse Washington is Burned at Stake,” *DMN*, May 16, 1916.
who wrote, “Lynching is the flaunting of the law…whether the prisoner has been found guilty or not….A handful of men lynched…Washington…but 15,000 looked on.” The editors continued, “all of Waco must answer for the crime that mocked the legal execution of a court’s solemn sentence.” The paper warned, “The newspapers of the north will be filled with reproach to a state they will call barbarous.” Finally, editors pleaded, “It is not for Texas to close its eyes and ears to the reprimand, but rather to set in to educate its people…that lynching is wrong.” About the same time as the *Star-Telegram* went to press, Elizabeth Freeman, a young suffragist, was on her way to Waco to investigate the lynching. W.E.B. Du Bois, editor of the NAACP’s newspaper, the *Crisis*, used the information Freeman gathered to publicize the cruelty of lynching in a campaign against the practice. In an eight page supplement to the July 1916 issue of *Crisis*, Du Bois dubbed the event “The Waco Horror.” Du Bois also challenged NAACP members to donate to the organization’s anti-lynching campaign as well as to recruit new members. This contributed greatly to the growth of the organization. Many consider the Washington lynching, and DuBois’ publicizing of it, a watershed in the Civil Rights movement.  

The incident was indeed a horror and truly an “infamous” part of Waco’s history. Many Wacoans were, no doubt, shamed and remembered it for years to come. Still others wanted to forget it altogether. Neff’s whereabouts during the period are uncertain though the event occurred a few blocks from his law office. The day after Washington’s arrest, the Knights of Pythias named Neff a “Grand Prelate” at a meeting in Dallas. But, Neff reportedly “advanced automatically” to the new rank and may or may not have been in Dallas. The day after the lynching, Neff was apparently in Waco where he confirmed to reporters that he would be

---

chairing a committee of the University of Texas Law Association that was to meet in Waco the following month to consider legal reform. Whether or not Neff was in Waco at the time of the lynching of Jesse Washington is unknown. In either case, he likely was just as horrified as the Progressive editors of the *Star-Telegram*. A few years later, as governor, Neff had an active and vocal distaste for mob violence and suggested to the legislature that it pass laws to prosecute those participating in lynch mobs. On a few occasions, including one in Waco, Governor Neff authorized the movement of prisoners threatened by lynching and/or authorized their protection by Texas Rangers or state police.\footnote{K. of P. Meetings Close at Dallas; Officers Elected,” *FWST*, May 11, 1916; “Committee Named Discuss Proposed Legal Reform,” *Waco Daily Times Herald*, May 16, 1916.}

Little more than a week after Washington’s lynching, Texas Democrats convened to choose delegates for the coming national convention. It quickly became clear that prohibition was going to be the major issue. In early May, the Anti-Saloon League of Texas proposed a resolution to be adopted at all county conventions that “we are opposed to the selection of any man as a delegate to the national democratic convention whose past political record shows that he is subservient to the organized liquor traffic.” Furthermore, the League proposed that delegates sent from county conventions to the upcoming state convention should be instructed “to vote for no man who is affiliated with the liquor traffic.” On the eve of the state convention at San Antonio, A.J. Barton promised “a good old-fashioned democratic scrap” if anti-prohibitionists tried to commit the national convention against prohibition. Barton refused to divulge prohibitionists’ tactics for the convention or speculate about their prospects but promised “One thing is certain, the state democratic convention…will not go on record as opposed to prohibition without a lively and interesting time.” Thus, the gauntlet was thrown down.\footnote{The Prohibition Touchstone,” *FWST*, May 5, 1916; “Fight in Convention Predicted by Barton,” *DMN* May 21, 1916.}
Prohibitionists’ efforts to control the state’s delegation to the national convention quickly centered on the election of Texas’ representative on the Democratic National Committee. Prohibitionists backed Thomas B. Love of Dallas; anti-Prohibitionists backed Judge William Poindexter. As delegates gathered for the state convention it appeared that the prohibitionists would have control of it. Barton warned, “We have enough votes…to control this convention.” Love added, “if the opposition pulls the rough stuff, my supporters will become more determined.” Joseph Weldon Bailey, a leader of the opposition, countered by proposing resolutions in opposition to both prohibition and woman suffrage. The stage was set for a bitter conflict between the Progressive/prohibitionist and conservative wings of the Texas Democratic Party. When the prohibitionists’ caucus met, they fired an opening salvo by proposing a slate of delegates that omitted both Bailey and Ferguson and endorsed Love as state committee man. Editors of the *Dallas Morning News* summed up the situation very succinctly noting, “The election of Mr. Love…would signify that the convention [Texas Democrats] favors national prohibition; his defeat that it does not.” The convention was, in effect, a showdown over prohibition. The faction that won the fight over national committee person would win the showdown—and presumably control of the state party.

Early signs pointed toward trouble for the prohibitionists. The committee on platforms and resolutions was under the control of the anti-prohibitionists with observers noting Ferguson and Bailey “in their shirtsleeves working together.” When the committee finished its work, it adopted planks in opposition to both prohibition and woman suffrage, just as Bailey had promised. This was the first time any state party had taken such action. As the convention drew to a close, reporters concluded that it had been a “complete routing of Anti-Saloon League forces

---

and an absolute victory for the Bailey-Ferguson combination on every count.” Furthermore, the vote for Texas democratic committee representative favored Poindexter over Love by a margin of 419 to 347. Love immediately vowed to contest the results. Prohibitionists did not go quietly. The minority report of the platforms and resolutions committee repudiated the majority on nearly every count. The one point of agreement was that of the obligatory support of the Woodrow Wilson administration. Cullen F. Thomas, one of Neff’s closest friends and a leader of the prohibitionist faction at the convention, led the drafting of the minority report and his signature appears at the top. Following the convention, political observers noted that Texas democrats were “a party made of irreconcilable factions.” They added that the party would “continue to be the sum of two factions utterly…in conflict with respect to a single question [prohibition] that overshadows every other question that makes an issue in politics.” This was a good assessment of Texas Democratic Party politics at the time.18

Neff was conspicuously absent from the convention. Given the bitter and divisive nature of the meeting, it was probably a good thing not to be closely associated with it. Upon returning to his Dallas law office at the conclusion of the convention, Thomas wrote Neff to apologize for acting in his name without his consent. Thomas explained, “You doubtless noticed you were slated by our caucus Elector at Large. At the time, we thought our caucus [prohibitionists] would control the convention.” In the confusion at the end of the convention, Thomas’ name was apparently placed in nomination and accepted for the same position and Neff’s was not. Thomas did not catch the mistake until he returned to Dallas. Thomas lamented, “I was very happy in trying to do something for you and I would have been glad to have been on the ticket with you as

a Woodrow Wilson elector.” At the end of the letter, Thomas extended his condolences to Neff and family over Ben Neff’s death. Thomas wrote, “I learned Pat, through the paper, of the untimely death of your brother. Please accept my sympathy for you, and more especially for your good mother.” In all likelihood, family responsibilities kept Neff on the political sidelines and out of the limelight in May of 1916.19

During 1917, Neff was much more in the public eye as he became more deeply involved in the prohibition movement just as the struggle between the Progressive-prohibitionist and conservative Bailey-Ferguson wings of the Texas Democratic Party reached a head. In July of 1917, there appeared to be “great interest” in the prohibition movement in McLennan County. Many in the county called on county commissioners to authorize the first “local option” election there in five years. At first, prohibitionist leaders in the county were unsure of whether or not to ask for the election, but on July 28th they decided to make the effort—and they elected Pat Neff to lead them. Neff and the “pros” then set about gathering signatures and raised some $5,000 in campaign funds. On September 24th the McLennan County Local Option Committee presented a signed petition to county commissioners calling on them to authorize a local option prohibition election for the entire county. The county commissioners set the date of the election for October 20th.20

With less than a month before the scheduled election, prohibitionists started the real work in earnest. The first Sunday in October found Waco’s churches filled with prohibitionists who gathered to mark the informal opening of the campaign. The formal campaign opened the next

19 Cullen F. Thomas to Neff, Letter, May 26, 1916, PNP.

night; its leader was the “principal speaker” at the event. Neff’s speech was fittingly titled “A Call to Arms.” Neff put the election in simple terms, stating, “The purpose of this campaign…is to prohibit the further protection of saloons in McLennan County. The one issue is saloons or no saloons….There will be no neutral ground and no occasion for slackers or fence riders.” Neff used seemingly every possible rhetorical device including sweeping language and religious imagery. Neff mentioned every possible argument against alcohol and delivered his speech like the prosecutor he was. He referred to “The Saloon” as the “chronic criminal of the centuries” that sold “poison.” Neff talked about the moral implications of liquor as well as the morals of its supporters. He also denounced the “infamous” role of the “whiskey traffic” on Texas politics and discounted its importance as a source of revenue. Neff even addressed the dangers of alcoholic beverages to national defense by arguing the need to keep them out of the hands of soldiers during wartime. Finally, Neff made “A Call to Arms and Service” calling for the support and diligent effort of the crowd. After having neatly presented what prohibition could do for them—Neff asked them what they could do for prohibition.21

As the campaign began, Neff exchanged correspondence with A.J. Barton who noted, “From the glimpse I get through the papers I conclude that your campaign is starting off well.” In an earlier communication, Neff had expressed the need for a dedicated “publicity man” for the campaign. Barton suggested the Fort Worth district superintendent, Reverend Atticus Webb. A few days later, Neff replied, “things are moving along nicely on this end of the line.” Neff declined the use of Webb for the campaign noting a desire “to make this strictly a home affair.” Barton was unwilling to let the point go, and suspecting their may be another reason for Neff’s refusal of help, responded, “While our good friends [prohibitionists] are shying away from the

---

League and are conducting campaigns strictly by home talent, the brewers and liquor people are bringing to bear not only...enormous money...but the best talent.” Clearly Barton and the Anti-Saloon League had great interest in what was becoming a high-profile campaign for prohibition in McLennan County and were willing to bring whatever resource they could to insure a win. Neff, on the other hand, was characteristically avoiding associations that might damage his cause. Too much involvement of the Anti-Saloon League in the campaign may well have been regarded as outside interference in McLennan County local affairs. Neff, no doubt, thought he could win with the resources he had and probably saw little need in risking accusations of outside interference for a little extra help.22

As election day approached, great voter interest was expected to translate into heavy turnout. At dawn, weather conditions were perfect with a cloudless blue Texas sky and temperatures around forty degrees. Prohibitionist women set up sandwich stands to feed voters waiting in line. In the voters hands lay the fate of seventy McLennan County saloons and five wholesale liquor houses. Sixty-five of the seventy saloons were situated in the city of Waco. When the votes were counted, the county had decided to go “dry” by a margin of about 1,000 votes. The prohibition victory was reported in newspapers as far away as Charlotte, North Carolina, and Colorado Springs, Colorado. Congratulations to the campaign’s leader, Neff, began coming in almost immediately. Barton sent his “hardest congratulations” in a telegram on election night. Thomas also sent a telegram that touched on several Progressive values noting that this “splendid victory means a bigger and better city.” Senator Morris Sheppard, who was the major congressional sponsor of the Eighteenth Amendment, was so moved he sent both a congratulatory telegram and a letter. In his reply to Barton, Neff wrote, “There was a splendid

22Barton to Neff, October 3, 1917, PNP; Neff to Barton, October 6, 1917, PNP.
spirit demonstrated by all parties during the entire campaign.” Neff then closed thanking Barton for his efforts. Neff also thanked his old friend, and law partner, George W. Barcus for his “faithful and untiring work.” This cemented a political working relationship between the two men that became very important in the next few years. Neff’s successful campaign for prohibition in McLennan County brought him renewed public visibility and marked the beginning of a renewed political viability.23

While Neff was busy managing the McLennan County local option campaign, Texas Progressives in Austin were busy settling old scores with Governor Ferguson. The episode that followed was so ugly, that Neff was probably lucky that he was not a public office holder and did not have to participate in it. Ferguson and the Progressives began to clash as soon as the governor was elected in 1914. Ferguson’s campaign demagoguery and steadfast promise to veto prohibition legislation wrought fury in the hearts and minds of Texas Progressives. Ferguson won the election with populist appeals, especially to poor and tenant farmers. The events of the 1916 state convention of the Texas Democratic Party only fueled the fire. In the meantime, the seeds of Ferguson’s downfall had already been sown. By 1917, Governor Ferguson and the University of Texas Board of Regents and faculty had established a deep seated distrust and dislike for one another. Their problems started in 1915 as acting university president, Dr. William J. Battle, and Ferguson began discussing a budget for the school. Ferguson wanted a detailed budget and Battle wanted a more flexible budget that would give regents more freedom to spend the appropriation. Ferguson immediately distrusted both Battle and the regents. A few

23“Heavy Vote is Expected in Waco Election,” FWST, October 20, 1917; “Dry Victory,” Charlotte Observer, October 21, 1917; “McLennan County, Texas, Swings Into Dry Column,” Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph, October 23, 1917; A.J. Barton to Neff, October 20, 1917, PNP; Cullen Thomas to Neff, October 20, 1917, PNP; Morris Sheppard to Neff, October 27, 1917, PNP; Morris Sheppard to Neff, October 27, 1917, PNP.
months later, the board selected Dr. Robert Vinson as the institution’s new president—without consulting Ferguson. This only gave credence to the governor’s suspicions.24

By the fall of 1916, the governor had made a list of university professors, whom he charged with corruption that he wished the regents to fire at once. Ferguson took the position that the professors were merely state employees with no rights of recourse. Will Hogg, son of the former governor and member of the board of regents, asked what reason he had for the firings to which Ferguson replied, “I don’t have to give any reasons. I am Governor of the State of Texas.” The regents responded by insisting that the governor show his evidence. Instead, Ferguson responded by making further accusations of the faculty selling class notes, books, and padding expense accounts. After investigating Ferguson’s charges, the regents found there had been some sloppiness with expense accounts but refused to fire any of the professors. In January of 1917, the “war” with the university worsened as Ferguson appointed three new members to the board of regents. At this point, friends of the university and alumnae started a public campaign against Ferguson’s treatment of the school. The legislature later approved the appointments, but also accepted the regent’s earlier report on Ferguson’s charges. The “war” reached a climax in June when Ferguson vetoed the university’s budget. A month later, on Ferguson’s behalf, the regents fired six professors including A. Caswell Ellis. By this time, Ferguson had made too many political enemies on many fronts that included Progressives, prohibitionists, woman suffragists, and University of Texas students, faculty, administration, and alumnae. More importantly, the governor had failed to realize that many of his political opponents were also graduates of the University of Texas—including Neff.25

As early as March of 1917, Ferguson’s opponents in the state legislature made moves to investigate allegations of wrong doing. Governor Ferguson watched as the House of Representatives considered the question of setting up an investigatory committee. Meanwhile, the House’s observation galleries “were packed to capacity” mostly with University of Texas students. One member took to the floor in defense of the governor exclaiming, “If the governor has as many enemies all over Texas as he has in the gallery this afternoon, he would have been burned long ago.” To this, a large number of “whews” arose from the gallery. Of course the problem was that Ferguson’s supporters in the countryside could not help him; where he needed help was in the legislature. The house voted to investigate Ferguson by a vote of 86 to 41. The committee members were appointed and had met before the day was up. Former Texas Attorney General Martin M. Crane was appointed to act as legal council for the governor’s opponents. In July, the Speaker of the House filed impeachment charges against Ferguson. Of the twenty-one charges filed against the governor, five concerned the university. Finally, in September, the Senate convicted Ferguson on ten counts, three of which were connected to the University of Texas. The main charge against Ferguson was that he had illegally received over $156,000 from the Texas Brewer’s Association. Ferguson was removed from office and barred from ever holding office again. He was succeeded by lieutenant governor William P. Hobby—a Progressive.26

With Ferguson mostly out of the way, Texas Progressives began pushing their agenda forward. Governor Hobby called a special session of the state legislature to meet in February 1918, barely four months after the impeachment of his predecessor. The governor did not specifically mention the issue of prohibition in his proclamation, but political observers assumed

that would be the main topic. In the interim, the Anti-Saloon League of Texas chimed in with a list of “demands” for legislators. The League began by noting, “We are now in the final drive against the evil of strong drink….Our task now is to complete the drive.” They demanded that Governor Hobby submit a measure to ban the sale of alcoholic beverages near military bases, schools, and other state institutions. The League also demanded that Texas legislators approve the pending prohibition amendment to the national constitution and, for good measure, vote to do the same to the state constitution. Both houses of the legislature met and reached a quorum on February 26th. Legislators did the Anti-Saloon League’s bidding with proposals for both state and national prohibition. The legislation moved quickly. Two weeks later, Texas became the seventh state to ratify what became the 18th Amendment to the Constitution. Clearly, as the *Dallas Morning News* observed, “prohibition forces in the Texas legislature are in the saddle.”

Woman suffragists were among those who had watched Ferguson’s impeachment proceedings from the observation galleries of the Texas Capitol Building. It would not be long before those women came down out of the gallery and onto the floor. Women played a major role in the removal of Ferguson, and their strong presence was a sign of their growing political voice. Nevertheless, their voice was limited without the vote. Texas Progressives and suffragists soon started work to make that come to pass. In early March, Governor Hobby revealed that he would “submit other matters” to the special session of the legislature to make changes to the state’s election laws including a provision for woman suffrage in primaries. On March 12th, at the request of Minnie Fisher Cunningham, President of the Texas Equal Suffrage Association, President Pro Tem of the Senate Edmond A. Dechard read a letter from President

---

Woodrow Wilson in support of primary woman suffrage. Wilson stated that he hoped the Texas legislature would “see its way to…give women the right to vote in primaries.” The president also put the matter in larger perspective stating, “The Democratic Party is so clearly committed to the principle of woman’s suffrage that I feel it is my duty as leader of the party to urge this action by the legislature.” Thus, Texas suffragists had the support of the nation’s leading Progressive.28

With the political winds in their sails, Progressive legislators quickly moved the measure through the Texas House and Senate. A day after Wilson’s letter was read into the record, legislative committees of both houses reported the primary woman suffrage measures favorably. Within days, the measure passed in both houses and was on its way to the governor’s desk. On March 26, 1918, Governor Hobby signed the legislation allowing Texas women to vote in primary elections and county conventions. Hobby presented the pen he used to sign the bill to Cunningham who said she regarded it as a “kind of crown.” The new law took effect on June 26, in time for the coming July primary elections. In the meantime, Texas woman began to register to vote. Officials in Tarrant County ordered 15,000 blank registration forms in anticipation of heavy demand. Candidates for office, such as Tol Johnson candidate for Tarrant County Sheriff, also appealed to “ladies and men voters.” James W. Swayne connected all of the Progressive political “dots” when he appealed to, “All Men and Women who Believe in Prohibition and Woman’s Suffrage.” More importantly, The Texas Equal Suffrage Association reminded women of a very important fact, “…with one-party rule…a vote in the primary election is equivalent to full suffrage.”29

---

28“Governor Hobby Will Submit Other Matters,” DMN, March 8, 1918; “Suffrage Bill is Offered 4 Others Involve Primary Changes,” FWST, March 12, 1918; “Wilson’s Letter Urging Texas Give Women Primary Vote is Read at Senate Session,” FWST, March 13, 1918.

29“Election Law Now before Legislature,” DMN, March 14, 1918; “Equal Suffrage Bill is Passed by
As the all-important Texas Democratic primary approached, newly enfranchised women and Progressives alike turned to the major race on the ballot that year—for governor. Oddly enough, Hobby was opposed by none other than Jim Ferguson who was able to have his name placed on the ballot by court order. Progressives rallied against the renewed Ferguson threat. Fort Worth women were urged to register and vote “irrespective of their views” at twenty-three Protestant churches. The women were reminded that “anti-vice laws are in danger of being repealed.” All of the talks had been arranged by Leroy Smith, chairman of Hobby’s election campaign in Tarrant County. Here the connection between woman suffrage, the Progressive agenda, moral reform, and Protestant religion is clear and is consistent with the mode of operation of southern Progressives. Hobby and the Progressives clearly depended on the presence of women in the electorate to neutralize Ferguson and further their own agenda. The governor made his last speech in the campaign in Galveston with Minnie Fisher Cunningham at his side. Hobby reminded voters that he had “approved more Progressive legislation in one short session than was ever passed.” Hobby won the election and received a “deluge” of congratulations from around the country.30

Editors of the *Forth Worth Star Telegram* called Hobby’s win, and Ferguson’s defeat, “A Great Victory for All Texans” and a repudiation of Fergusonism “from the panhandle to the gulf and from Texarkana to El Paso.” They also referred to Ferguson’s recent fight with the University, stating, “It has put every political four-flusher in the state on notice that no cheap politician can raise his voice against the University of Texas.” Of their competitors, who

---

30“Speakers Appear in Churches to Urge Women to Register,” *FWST*, July 1, 1918; “Hobby Makes Final Speech at Galveston,” *DMN*, July 27, 1918; “Deluge of Congratulations Are Received by Hobby,” *DMN*, July 30, 1918.
supported Ferguson, the editors wrote, “It has taught every weak-kneed, jelly-spined newspaper…that the policy of silence in the face of great moral crisis…leads to forfeiture of the confidence and respect of patriotic citizens.” Of the role of women in the election, the editors noted, “The women of Texas have shown themselves worthy….But the victory was not merely a victory of the women. The red-blooded men of the state went to the polls shoulder to shoulder with their wives and daughters.” The women had joined the men on equal terms and played their part. The Star Telegram concluded, “Today is a day for rejoicing, and July 27, 1918, will long be remembered as a glorious day in our history.” Indeed, it looked like Texas’ progressive Democrats were winning the struggle with the conservative wing of the party, but other battles were yet to come and Neff would have a role in them.\footnote{“A Great Victory for All of Texas,” Editorial, FWST, July 28, 1918.}

While much of this was going on, the United States was engaged in the First World War. Neff did his part as a good citizen, putting his skill and reputation as one of the best orators in Texas to work as a “Four Minute Man.” During 1917 and 1918, Neff traveled the state making speeches and selling Liberty Bonds. He made simple patriotic speeches with titles such as “The American Flag.” In another speech, entitled “A World-Wide War,” Neff noted how the war threatened to “assassinate humanity and bankrupt the world” and closed by vowing that the government of the United States “would sheath not the sword until the German autocracy has bit the dust of defeat forever.” In still another speech, entitled “Buy Liberty Bonds,” Neff got directly to the point at hand, “In this mighty death struggle for human rights, each patriot has a part to perform….This great army of civilians behind the army… is asked at this time by the government to buy Liberty Bonds.” If patriotic appeal was not enough, Neff sealed the deal by noting that the bonds were tax free and interest bearing. He was apparently quite effective; in
September of 1918, he was asked by Curtis Hancock of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas to tour the state in a three-week whistle-stop train tour to sell bonds. After the tour was completed, A.E. Lanier, also of the Federal Reserve Bank, thanked Neff for his services noting “…we all feel your services were invaluable….and it is impossible for us to tell you how much we appreciate the time you gave to this work.” The war ended a month later, and Neff’s oratory had helped fund it.  

By the end of 1918, both suffragists and prohibitionists were nearing the end of what were to be successful campaigns. Despite their success at passage of a federal amendment, which still had not gained final ratification, Texas prohibitionist leaders called for a general meeting in support of a state prohibition amendment and Neff was among them. They wanted to be sure that prohibition would come to Texas through either state or federal action. They proclaimed, “With the World War ended, the present and prospective conditions of state and national liquor legislation demand the earliest possible adoption of constitutional prohibition in Texas” and called for Governor Hobby to support it. Pat Neff, Atticus Webb, and Cullen Thomas were among those who signed the document. Less than a month later, the issue became moot when the Eighteenth Amendment to the federal Constitution received final ratification with the approval of the Nebraska legislature on January 16, 1919. The amendment’s architect, Texas’ own Senator Morris Sheppard received a round of applause on the floor of the Senate. In the years previous, in addition to practicing law, dealing with family emergencies, and selling war bonds, Neff had also made many speeches around the state in support of prohibition. Neff received requests for speaking engagements from prohibitionists as late as May of 1919. By

---

32 “Pat Neff to Speak,” FWST, May 5, 1918; Pat Neff, “A World Wide War,” Speech, Undated, PNP; Pat Neff, “Buy Liberty Bonds,” Undated, PNP; Curtis Hancock to Neff, September 14, 1918, PNP; A.E. Lanier to Neff, October 22, 1918, PNP.
then, however, Neff and his fellow Progressives had probably turned their attention to holding the hard won Governor’s Mansion.33

Texas politics during the 1910s was marked by volatility and struggle between the Progressive-prohibitionist and conservative wings of the Democratic Party. As the decade ended, it appeared that the Progressives were gaining the upper hand. Ferguson’s war with the University of Texas and his impeachment was a new plateau in the struggle within the party but other events were also critically important. During the summer of 1916, the struggle first reached a boiling point over the control of the Texas delegation to the Democratic National Convention. Ferguson won that particular battle with the Progressive-prohibitionists but it also sowed the seeds for his downfall. At the same time, the Jesse Washington lynching drew attention to bad race relations, mob violence, and the horrors of lynching that foretold the racial division and violence of the coming decade. It appears that during 1916, Neff was on the political sidelines owing to the potentially scandalous nature of the Majestic Theater deal and due to family responsibilities following his brother’s death. During 1917, the struggle within the Texas Democratic Party reached fever pitch; Neff was leading the McLennan County Local Option Campaign at the same time as Ferguson’s impeachment. During 1918 and early 1919, Neff kept a busy schedule as he traveled the state speaking in behalf of prohibition and selling Liberty Bonds. Politically he had shown his abilities as a leader in the successful prohibition campaign, as well as demonstrating skills as a public speaker, and more importantly, because he had not held elected state office in many years, voters likely regarded him as an Austin “outsider” not associated with the rancor of the previous few years. Moreover, either as an observer to events in Austin, or as leader in the prohibition campaign, Neff likely learned

33“Texas Pros Called to Meet Dec. 11,” DMN, November 24, 1918; “National Prohibition Amendment Adopted,” DMN, January 17, 1919; “Cheer Texas Senator When Nebraska Puts Pro Amendment Over,” FWST, January 17, 1919; R. Harper Kirby to Neff, May 3, 1919, PNP; O.C. Hallmark to Neff, May 10, 1919, PNP.
valuable political lessons. As 1919 ended, Texas Progressives and suffragists had still to gain ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment—and Neff was running for governor of Texas.
CHAPTER 6

“VOX POPULI, VOX DEI” NEFF’S ELECTION—1920

Bearing in mind that the testimony of the great as to the Bible in the making of our society, and convinced that its teachings must at all times be ingrained in the fundamental life of the State, I placed on the Governor’s desk the last morning I sat by it, a Bible inscribed, ‘To all my successors in office.’ I did so with the prayerful hope that there will never be a Governor in Texas to whom the Word of God is not true and sacred and binding.

--Pat M. Neff

“Vox Populi, Vox Dei,” or translated, “Voice of the People, Voice of God,” was the title of one of Pat Neff’s many speeches and is well illustrated by the above excerpt of yet another of his speeches. The quotes reflect Neff’s attitudes toward both democratic government and religion and the relationship thereof. To a great extent, the “vox populi” was called upon once again in 1920 to decide whether the Progressive-prohibitionist or conservative wings of the Texas Democratic Party were in control. This contest for a new governor was both bitter and contentious. Initially, the race was between four Progressive candidates, including Neff and the conservative candidate, former United States Senator Joseph Weldon Bailey. In some ways, the fight foreshadowed the famous and bitter contest between Earle B. Mayfield and George Peddy for the U.S. Senate that followed in 1924. Neff’s victory in 1920 constituted a triumph for Progressives. Mayfield’s victory in 1924 constituted a success for conservatives. Together the two races reveal the strength of both wings of the party as well as the fluidity of Texas politics at the time. By 1920 Bailey had been out of office for several years, and though still influential, was largely out of touch with Texas. Neff, on the other hand, had of late traveled the state extensively in support of both prohibition and the war effort. Neff’s contacts with and support
from Progressive activists kept him in the thick of Texas politics. Meanwhile, his Southern Progressive ideals and clean public image ultimately made Neff governor.¹

In many ways the 1920 elections were seen as a referendum on both Progressivism and the administration of President Woodrow Wilson. This was especially true in Texas. Texas Democrats played a huge role in Wilson’s nomination in 1912; his chief political advisor was “Colonel” Edward House a Texan who had acted in the same capacity for Governor James S. Hogg. During the governor’s race in 1920, Wilson and his administration were very much at issue. Generally, Bailey denounced the administration and its policies, while Neff and the Progressives praised it. Bailey had also been opposed to woman suffrage and newly enfranchised women were not about to forget it. Neff’s lack of vocal support for the suffragists likely cost him support among women but at least he had not actively worked against them as had Bailey. In the end, division within the party, the accompanying disorder, and probably Texas tradition, made it possible for “charismatic personalities” like Bailey, and later Mayfield, to gain popular attention among conservatives. Neff fulfilled the same role for Progressives by virtue of his sweeping oratory and moral solidity. Neff’s unique combination of Progressive political values and conservative social values allowed him to reach the head of the Progressive political pack and broadened his appeal with the wider electorate.²

When Neff began his campaign for governor more than a year in advance of the first primary, he ran an independent campaign that was somewhat separated from organized party politics. According to Neff, “No one solicited me to run for governor. I did not ask permission

¹Pat M. Neff, Making Texan: Five Minute Declamations, (Austin: Gamel’s Books, 1931), “Vox Populi, Vox Dei,” 10; Randolph B. Campbell, Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 358-9; Campbell notes that Neff was a “devoutly religious prohibitionist” and credits him with being the first gubernatorial candidate to campaign by automobile. Neff himself claimed to have used just about any transportation means possible in 1920 while taking his campaign directly to more Texans in more counties than any previous candidate.

²Neff, Making Texans, 10.
of anyone to get into the race … without a conference with or advice from anyone, I announced my candidacy.” Then to emphasize his independence, he added, “No publicly recognized political leader had any interests… on me. No business interests had any concern. … Without a campaign manager, without political headquarters…. I proceeded to take my candidacy in person to the hearts and homes of the people.” This passage reveals much about Neff’s priorities in seeking office. In addition to his sense of independence, it also reveals a strong willingness to take his case directly to the people of Texas. These patterns continued throughout Neff’s term in office. His independence allowed him to maintain a practical approach and also made him appear to be above politics. Neff’s willingness to go to the people by way of statewide speaking tours reappeared during his re-election campaign in 1922 and during his fight for an uninstructed delegation to the 1924 Democratic National Convention.³

In the course of the 1920 campaign, Neff traveled far and wide across the state, from “Texline to Brownsville and from Texarkana to El Paso.” He targeted sparsely populated areas and reported that he had campaigned in thirty-seven counties that no gubernatorial candidate had ever visited. In addition, Neff used nearly every conceivable means of transportation, including airplanes, trains, automobiles, and even a mule. In a time when roads were rough and few, and automobiles were at least temperamental if not unreliable, he drove his car some 6,000 miles in pursuit of the governor’s mansion. It was a long arduous campaign for Neff that also revealed something of his populist character by way of his propensity for talking to people in barbershops and country stores. According to Neff, “From the first day of January 1920, to the last Saturday in August, I spoke approximately 850 times…. When I campaigned in a small town without a speaking date, I made it a practice to shake hands with everybody I could find.” Neff’s diligent

³Pat M. Neff, The Battles of Peace, 7.
approach was most likely the product of personal character, but it may also have been the result of his understanding of the political climate. In either case, Neff’s hard working campaign style would have appealed to both urban and rural voters. The latter group would have been especially important to an urban progressive candidate because they constituted a large voting bloc that may not have supported him otherwise.\textsuperscript{4}

Whereas other candidates may have discounted or ignored the Mexican-American community, Neff apparently did not. In February, Neff made a campaign stop in Laredo where he visited with friends and sympathizers and voters in general. Neff met with Laredo citizens in the town market in an event that was announced in advance in the Spanish-language newspaper, Evolucion. The paper reported that Neff would explain his program and aspirations for the state and also noted his reputation as an orator. Evolucion referred to Neff’s program as “extensive” and “very interesting.” In subsequent appearances before Mexican and Mexican-American audiences, Neff made many of the same points he made before Anglo audiences such as the need for strong law enforcement and industrial development. One key difference is that Neff expressed disappointment in recent American intervention in Mexico, a sentiment that likely drew much appreciation among Mexicans. Just prior to Neff’s taking office, he led a trade mission to Mexico that was accompanied by a staff reporter from San Antonio’s Spanish language daily, La Prensa. Neff was greeted warmly by Mexicans and traveled to several Mexican cities including Monterrey and Tampico. Neff and his delegation met with the Chamber of Commerce of Mexico and traveled to several industrial concerns that included,

\textsuperscript{4}Neff, Battles of Peace, 7-9; Neff’s primary means of travel during his campaign was by car or passenger train; however, bad weather or tight scheduling sometimes necessitated the use of other means of transport.
ironically, the Cuauhtemoc brewery. The trip sowed the seeds for repairing relations between Mexico and the United States in the wake of the Mexican Revolution.\(^5\)

During his election campaign, and during his tenure as governor, Neff maintained close contacts with Texas Progressives as well. For example, one of the most interesting exchanges was between Neff and Dallas attorney and former Attorney General, Martin M. Crane. Crane was a devoted Progressive and long-time opponent of Bailey. In 1906, Crane had a much publicized debate with Bailey over the issue of politicians’ acceptance of money from business interests, an offense of which the senator was accused. Ultimately, Bailey left the Senate in 1911 because of the growing strength of Progressives like Crane within the party. Bailey’s return to run for governor in 1920 exacerbated the rift between conservatives and Progressives. Crane maintained contact with Bailey’s political opponents including Neff. In one letter, he alluded to his exchanges with Neff and his concern over the coming election. Crane wrote, “I am much troubled at present about our number of candidates; we [Progressives] have three for governor, the opposition has but one [Bailey].” The three Progressives Crane mentioned were, Neff, Benjamin Looney, and Robert Thomason—all were well-known politicians. Crane pleaded, “Is there not some way that would be satisfactory to you, Mr. Looney, and Mr. Thomason, [other Progressive candidates] that will enable us to get together.” Crane continued promising, “I do not expect you to say anything publicly about it … the success of our cause is far more important than the success of any particular individual.” It is evident from the passage that Neff and Crane

\(^{5}\)“Hoy Va A Hablar Un Candidato Papa Gor. De Texas Pat W. Neff De Waco, Texas Dara Una Asamblea En El Mercado,” Evolucion, February 12, 1920; “Enthusiasta Fue La Recepcion Al Gobor. Hobby P. Neff Hizo Optimistas Declaraciones A Los Periodicos,” La Prensa, December 12, 1920; “Mr. Neff Regresa De Mexico Lleno De Gran Enthusiasmo.” La Prensa, December 12, 1920; See also Don M. Coerver and Linda B. Hall, Texas and the Mexican Revolution: A Study in State and National Border Policy, 1910-1920 (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1984) and Alan Knight, U.S.-Mexican Relations, 1910-1940 (La Jolla, CA : Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1987); Following the Mexican Revolution, American interference in it, as well as the subsequent nationalization of American property in Mexico, U.S.-Mexican relations were strained for many years. Neff’s trade visit to Mexico was a bright spot in relations between the two countries in a period marred by ill will on both sides.
were likely cooperating in some way. In a follow-up letter, Crane expressed support for Wilson’s administration, an assumption of public support for Wilson, as well as Neff’s own support of the president.⁶

A few days later, Neff answered Crane’s earlier letters, after first apologizing for the delay caused by a busy campaign schedule. Neff mentioned that he had been campaigning for two weeks and had discussed the very issues in which Crane was interested. Neff wrote, “Answering your inquiry as to my stand with reference to the Wilson administration, desire it to say that…I have made seventeen speeches in behalf of the League of Nations and the Wilson administration. I really thought my attitude…to be well-known.” In fact, Neff had a stock speech on the league that he gave to different organizations on a number of occasions for several years. After reassuring Crane of his credentials, Neff closed the letter by noting that he would be in Dallas in the next week or so and expressed interest in meeting with Crane. These letters marked the beginning of what would be a cordial correspondence between the two men that lasted into Neff’s first term.⁷

A crucial group was the prohibitionists with whom Neff was naturally on good terms. Neff frequently corresponded with Claudia Hightower of the Texas Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). By the time of his run for governor, he had known Hightower for several years as both of them had been active in the prohibition movement. In a letter to her a little more than a month prior to the primary, Neff expressed his appreciation for her “interest” in his campaign as well as her “splendid work.” Neff also directly addressed the importance of

---


⁷Neff to Crane, January 24, 1920, PNP.
Hightower, and women in general, when he wrote, “Of course, I realize the importance of the organization of the women and assure you that anything you may do along this line will be sincerely appreciated. Hoping to hear from you frequently as to political conditions.” Neff also maintained connections to prohibitionist men such as J. Frank Norris, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth. By 1920, Norris was well known for being both sensational and controversial in his fight against alcohol and gambling. Nevertheless, Neff courted Norris’ support when he wrote, “Knowing your interest in all things that affect the people morally, socially, politically, educationally and religiously. I feel no hesitancy in writing you in behalf of my candidacy for Governor… I am exceedingly anxious to have your open support.” Neff received the wholehearted support of both Hightower and Norris and maintained contact with both throughout his tenure as governor.8

Neff had kept in close contact with various women’s organizations in the state and generally tried to appease them. Neff sent many letters to various club women around the state in late 1919. In one letter Neff wrote, “I am exceedingly anxious to be honored by receiving, not only your vote, but your active support…I am planning to…declare myself in sympathy with the program and the purposes of the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs.” Neff added, “I have always been a prohibitionist…I have at all times been in favor of women’s suffrage …If elected governor, I shall do whatever is possible, …to enforce the prohibition laws and to give to woman her long denied standing at the ballot box.” This letter sought to cement Neff’s good standing among women voters and is clearly designed to appeal to what was perceived to be their wishes.

---

In the next few years, Neff continued to cultivate the friendship and support of women’s groups. He rarely declined their speaking requests, and when he did, was often very apologetic. Neff apparently gave private assurances of his support for woman suffrage but was unwilling to do so publicly. The support of women was crucial to Neff’s election—and he knew it. Nevertheless, Neff also knew the race was likely to be tight and might hinge on bleeding off votes from conservatives. As a candidate, Neff steered a careful course with regard to women; he spoke often to widely regarded organizations like the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs (TFWC) and avoided close association with the more political Texas Equal Suffrage Association until passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. For political reasons, Neff chose to publicly acknowledge women who remained on the widely acceptable “pedestal” of club work, while refraining from any public acknowledgment of suffragists until they received full legal rights to engage in “politics.”

During most of Neff’s election campaign, the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment was ongoing. Since suffrage leaders realized they needed the support of some southern states to obtain final ratification, and since they had obtained primary suffrage for Texas women, the state was a battleground. Texas suffrage leader Minnie Fisher Cunningham believed Neff had done “nothing” for the suffragist cause and generally regarded him as “more show than substance.” She also found his platform to be “sentimental bosh and rubbish.” It is likely that many Texas women shared Cunningham’s opinion. Furthermore, Neff’s refusal to publicly support woman suffrage was a source of considerable consternation among Progressives in general. In a letter from Jane Spell of Waco to Mrs. Will Trigg of Cameron, the two women discussed Neff’s

---

9Neff to Mrs. M. F. Bewley, November 14, 1919, PNP, This was a form letter and there are several examples bearing the same date sent to various Texas club women; The transition of southern women in the public realm from church and club work to woman suffrage and direct political participation is revealed in Anne Firor Scott’s *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
position first hand. Spell was president of the Waco Equal Franchise Association and had Dr.
S.P. Brooks, President of Baylor University and a close friend of Neff, serving on an advisory
board. As both the suffrage and gubernatorial primary campaigns were drawing to a close,
Brooks noticed that Neff’s name did not appear on Spell’s list of prominent Waco men
supporting suffrage. Brooks said, “Mrs. Spell, Pat’s name should be there.” Spell agreed and
suggested that Brooks ask Neff personally. Brooks immediately picked up the telephone and
called Neff, and after some conversation, hung-up and told Spell, “Pat will not endorse it.” Spell
replied, “I think this is a poor political move.” Brooks agreed.10

Later, Spell got the opportunity to ask Neff directly about the incident and his refusal to
the support suffragists. Neff told Spell that he had refused Brooks’ appeal because “he did not
believe it was necessary.” Spell replied no doubt heatedly that, “If Mr. Thomason and the rest of
the men of Texas had taken the active part in the women’s cause that he did, there would be no
reason for him or the politicians of Texas to feel anxious about how the women…were going to
vote, because they would have no vote.” Spell wrote that she regretted this because Neff was a,
“townsmen and neighbor,” but it meant that she could not support him. In June of 1920, when
Spell wrote her letter, woman suffrage was in a kind of limbo. Though Texas women could vote
in the upcoming primary in July, the national suffrage amendment had yet to be ratified and no
one knew whether that would happen, if ever. Until then, suffrage remained a political football.
The fractured nature of Texas Democratic Party politics at the time required politicians to either
to take a position or to take no public position in order to avoid alienating voters. Furthermore, it
was still unclear which wing of the Texas Democratic Party was stronger, the conservatives or

10Judith N. MacArthur and Harold L. Smith. Minnie Fisher Cunningham: A Suffragist’s Life in Politics,
(New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). 93; Newspaper Clipping, Folder 13, Box 7, Minnie Fisher Cunningham
Papers, University of Houston, Houston, Texas; Mrs. W.E. Spell to Mrs. W.E. Trigg, June 10, 1920, Folder 13, Box
7, Minnie Fisher Cunningham Papers, University of Houston, Houston, Texas.
the Progressives. It is also entirely possible that Spell misunderstood, or at least did not appreciate Neff’s position. When Neff said that “he did not believe it was necessary” to take a public stand on woman suffrage, it may not have meant that he did not believe women should have the vote, or that his endorsement would be important. It may have simply meant that he felt he did not need to endorse suffrage to win, and that it would happen anyway whether or not he did. Neff knew that he was going to be in a tight five-way race—so he took no position on a controversial issue that might soon become moot.11

Neff’s caginess on woman suffrage was typical of him when faced with ambiguous or difficult political situations. For example, Neff’s relationship with labor was always a little tenuous and was mostly the result of his reluctance to strongly, and consistently, back labor. At best, Neff’s views toward labor were ambivalent. He avoided close association with labor to negate conservative criticism but, as a Progressive, he needed to maintain friendly relations with it. During this time, it often seemed as though labor courted Neff more than he courted it. Nevertheless, Neff did seek the support of labor organizations. For example, Eaton Williams of The Toiler, “a weekly devoted to the interests of all organized labor,” acknowledged receipt of an earlier letter from Neff and promised to distribute campaign material. Williams wrote, “I have already talked to a number on regard to your candidacy for Governor and those that I have talked with, seems to be for you and I honestly believe that you will receive 75 percent of the labor vote in Dallas County.” In this case, Neff was obviously trying to reach as many labor voters as possible through this Dallas publication. In another letter, Neff courted the International Association of Oil Field, Gas Well, and Refinery Workers of America. The editor of that organization’s trade paper, George Fisher wrote, “I am in receipt of your letter of the 12th

11Ibid.
soliciting my support of your candidacy for governor of Texas. I am for the man that can defeat Joe Bailey and shall support whichever candidate appears to be the strongest.” Fisher’s letter illustrates an important point. Neff did not have to court labor particularly hard because of its great opposition to Bailey.12

When Neff began the campaign in earnest in early 1920, he was well placed to appeal to the voters of Texas. Neff was already considered a friend by Texas club women and women in general who would be voting in their first election in the fall. He was also favored by the state’s prohibitionists, with whom he had a long relationship. In addition, Neff had made valuable inroads into labor, and the state’s Progressives considered him to be one of their own because of his support of Wilson and the League of Nations. Generally, Neff had his bases well-covered and was truly the political opposite of Bailey. By February of 1920, Neff had already been in the campaign for six months. As yet, the party’s conservatives had no candidate. The initial rumblings of a possible gubernatorial campaign by Bailey occurred during the first week of the month when it was revealed that the former senator was returning to the state after a long absence in Washington, D.C., where he also had a home. Over the course of the next few weeks there were increasing indications of Bailey’s impending candidacy. Finally, on February 18, Bailey announced his intention to run and set forth his “essential principles.”13

These principles set Bailey apart from Neff. Generally, Bailey’s principles consisted of fiscal responsibility, state’s rights, and resistance to Progressivism. Bailey also proposed referendums on woman suffrage and the League of Nations, both of which he opposed. Bailey’s conservative nature was plainly apparent in his opening speech in which he said:

---

12Eaton Williams to Neff, March 15, 1920, PNP; George Fisher to Neff, March 17, 1920, PNP.
Times may change, and men may change with them, but principles never change; they are as immutable as truth and justice, they are the same today as they were yesterday, and they will be the same tomorrow as they are today …these prophets of a new cult, when they came into power, now almost seven years ago, proceeded to substitute Progressive policies for Democratic principles.

One cannot help but notice that this passage reads like both a conservative pledge of allegiance and a declaration of war on Progressivism. Thus, Bailey put Progressives on notice that he intended to give the electorate a clear choice—if nothing else. Bailey went on to criticize excessive government spending and debt accrued during the war. This too, Bailey laid at the feet of Progressives. Bailey added:

Taxation in this country is rapidly approaching the point of confiscation. Unless we can rescue the government from the mismanagement of these improvident politicians, the youngest man in this audience will not live long enough to see our war debt paid or war taxes repealed. Both should be done, but it is certain that neither will be done by these Progressive democrats, nor can we expect much better of the Republicans.

In the end, Bailey and his policies became the central issue in the campaign. Bailey’s entry into the race marked the beginning of a bitter contest to see which elements were stronger within the Texas Democratic Party, the old-line conservatives, or the Progressives. 14

If Bailey fired the opening salvo of the campaign, Neff answered with a full broadside. In a speech in Hillsboro, Neff first alluded to Bailey’s apparent residency in Washington instead of Texas. He said to laughter and applause, “A well-known and distinguished citizen of Washington has announced his candidacy for Governor of Texas.” Neff then referred to Bailey as “an alien citizen of Texas running for state office on a federal platform.” He added, “Bailey is legally disqualified by the Constitution to become governor…The Constitution clearly provides that a candidate for governor shall have resided in the state for at least five years preceding the election.” The crowd responded gleefully with cries of “Skin him! We don’t want him!” Neff

14“Bailey Announces for Governorship,” February 19, 1920, DMN.
then attacked Bailey’s conservative demeanor by noting, “He is a negative, not an affirmative
personality, and never during his congressional career produced a single constructive measure
but has always been a ‘knocker’ and is opposed to everything.” At this point, Neff picked up the
Progressive mantle. Noting the “change of the times,” Neff said, “We’ve got to keep up in
legislative and governmental affairs with this rapid civilization we are living in. I am not
running for governor on the activities of other generations or on what happened a hundred years
ago.” With this, Neff too offered the voters of Texas a clear choice—the future or the past.15

So, with the battle lines drawn, and the options known to all, the Progressives rallied. On
March 6, a mass-meeting of “Woodrow Wilson Democrats” assembled in Dallas at City Hall
Auditorium. The meeting of up to 1,200 included many of Texas’s most prominent Progressive
politicians and activists including Governor William Hobby and Martin Crane. The four
Progressive candidates for governor, Benjamin F. Looney, Dwight Lewelling, Robert Thomason,
and Pat Neff appeared. Others participants included General Federation of Women’s Club
President Anna Pennybacker, Texas League of Women Voters President Jessie Daniel Ames,
and Texas Equal Suffrage Association President Minnie Fisher Cunningham. Generally,
speakers at the meeting gave high praise to Wilson and his administration and condemned
Bailey. In a speech by fellow attorney, and long-time friend of Neff, Cullen Thomas, the
Progressives answered the call to arms. Thomas said, “We delight to call ourselves Progressive
Democrats. We stand arrayed against the Bourbon Democrats, who never forgot the old and

15 “Neff Scores Bailey in Hillsboro Speech,” February 22, 1920, DMN; Neff’s treatment of Bailey’s career
in the Senate seems harsh. However, Bailey served as Texas’ United States Senator from 1901 to 1912. In that
time, he assaulted a fellow senator on the floor of the Senate. Muckrakers at Cosmopolitan magazine also identified
Bailey as a tool of big business. A scandal involving payment of large attorney fees to Bailey by Waters-Pierce Oil
Company, which was thrown out of Texas by anti-trust regulators, ruined Bailey’s reputation. Bailey should
probably not have run for office in 1920; Neff was only reminding Texans of what they already knew about his
opponent. See Bob C. Holcomb, “BAILEY, JOSEPH WELDON,” Handbook of Texas Online accessed February
never learn the new. We know we live in a new day and we won’t spend our time groping in graveyards.”

When Neff’s turn to speak came, he began on a more conciliatory note. Saying, “We are gathered here not to weaken but to strengthen, not to destroy but to preserve the Democratic Party. In this fight, let none but true Democrats be placed on guard.” Neff then reiterated his earlier statements about Bailey saying, “Bailey is an objector. He doesn’t stand for anything. He doesn’t today endorse the conduct of any living man except himself…He believes he is the only living statesman.” Finally, to rousing applause, Neff concluded, “Let Bailey go back into his shell. Let him go back to Washington. But let the Democrats of Texas today get ready for the battle and go forward.” In later years, party leaders sometimes asked Neff to strike a conciliatory note to “true Democrats,” old-line conservatives, for the sake of strengthening or preserving the party as he did here. But, in this case, Neff would brook no mention of reconciliation with a bitter opponent like Bailey. Nevertheless, Neff said exactly what he needed to for the occasion and the mud slinging and name-calling only increased afterward.

One issue that was prominent in the campaign was the wartime service records of Neff and Bailey. Many questioned Bailey’s patriotism and his refusal to support the financing plan for the war. In a speech in Fort Worth in April, Neff criticized Bailey’s failure to speak for the American Red Cross and particularly his refusal to sell “Liberty Bonds.” Neff noted that Bailey had refused to be a “four-minute” man, one who made four-minute speeches to sell bonds during the war. Neff said that Bailey had “declined by stating that he could not afford to recommend to his friends the purchase of these bonds to carry on the war.” About a week later, Bailey responded to the charges by saying, “And I’ll tell you this—and it isn’t an idle threat either. If

16 Bailey is Denounced by Wilson Democrats,” March 7, 1920, DMN;
17 Ibid.
one of them [who had made the charges] will say to my face that I was not loyal to my country he will think I am a warrior.” At about the same time, Neff’s people discovered a sworn affidavit in which Bailey admitted that he had indeed refused to sell the bonds. At this point, the Bailey campaign hit back—hard. There was apparently some question over whether or not Neff should have registered for the draft. Bailey, of course, publicly accused Neff of not registering when he should have. The entire issue hinged on Neff’s age to within a year.18

Neff answered the charges directly at the courthouse square in Gainesville—Bailey’s home. After first referring to Bailey’s allegations, Neff continued his speech saying, “It is after calm, cool, deliberate thought that I thus refer to Mr. Bailey….I desire now to brand that statement an unmitigated lie and I desire to brand Mr. Bailey as an insolent and infamous liar.” With that off his chest, and Bailey’s charges forcefully refuted, Neff noted that his opponent had shown “the low depth [to which] a puny political muckraker can descend to boost his own failing political future.” Neff then renewed his charges that Bailey had not contributed to the war effort saying, “I have been looking forward to my visit to Gainesville so I could ask you how many bonds Mr. Bailey bought.” To which a cooperative voice in the crowd called out, “He bought his bonds in Washington, he does not live here.” This moved Neff on to another allegation that Bailey did not live in Gainesville, or Texas, and was by extension ineligible for the office. Neff asked, “What does Mr. Bailey live on in Gainesville? He says this is his home….I can’t find out much about Mr. Bailey from the people who are his townsmen.” Neff conceded that he did find one woman, presumably German-American, who was wearing a Bailey campaign button but she “couldn’t speak English.” Thus, according to Neff, Bailey was a liar, who did not contribute to the war, who did not live in Gainesville, or earn his living there, and who was apparently

supported only by the local German population. It was brilliant politics in his opponent’s own backyard. Neff was eventually able to put the issue of his birth date to rest by producing an old family bible with the correct date, but Bailey was never able to shake the loyalty question.\(^{19}\)

A look at some of the flyers used during the campaign reveals much about its issues and overall tenor. In 1920, there were no mass communications for candidates to use other than newspapers. Dallas’s radio station WFAA, owned by the *Dallas Morning News*, did not even go on the air until June 1921. Because of this, candidates for state-wide office had to keep grueling speaking schedules in order to reach a broad cross-section of the electorate. In one of Neff’s flyers, his courting of the female vote is again apparent. It read, “Hon. Pat M. Neff- Will Speak in Gainesville Thursday- at 8 P.M. - from the steps of the of the east side of the Court House.” In large print on the bottom, it read, “Ladies Especially Welcome.” Labor’s support of the Progressive candidate is apparent in a series of flyers put out by the Labor Political League of Texas Campaign Committee. One flyer had written across the top “ARE YOU A UNION MAN?” The next line read, “Then vote for Neff, Thomason, or Looney.” In bold letters, nearly as big as the header it read, “Vote Against Bailey.” Across the bottom it read, “Vote Right, Let Labor Rule in Texas.” In another flyer, distributed by the same organization, the appeal was made to rural workers. Its header read, “Mr. Farmer and Farm Laborer” and below it read, “Join Hands with Labor, Vote for Looney, Thomason, or Neff for Governor.” Again in bold print it read, “VOTE AGAINST BAILEY.”\(^{20}\)

Clearly, Texas Progressives were working diligently against Bailey. In fact, Bailey was so rabidly conservative that practically everyone but the old-line Democrats arrayed against him.

\(^{19}\)“Neff Denounces Bailey Charge as Lie; Bailey as Infamous Liar *FWST* August 22, 1920; “Old Bible of Neff Family is Shown,” August 22, 1920, *DMN*.

\(^{20}\)Neff Campaign Flyer, July 1920, PNP; Labor Political League of Texas Campaign Committee Flyers, May, 1920, PNP.
Many on the conservative side equated their political opponents to communists. Neff apparently was not bothered by this association, and more than likely got a little chuckle out of it. At his speaking engagements, Neff’s campaign often handed out cards with his name and photo on them. In one case, Neff apparently had handed back to him one of these cards with the following scrawled on it: “You are branded a ‘Red’ and correctly so--.” This depicts the strength of political feeling of the right at the time. It is interesting to note that such accusations became common in Texas politics and started just three short years after the Russian Revolution. Neff was apparently more amused than offended as he had kept the card and filed it away rather than disposing of it.  

Shortly before the primary, Minnie Fisher Cunningham took time out from her work toward gaining passage of the federal suffrage amendment to do some electioneering. Cunningham contacted suffragists from around the state on behalf on Thomason who as a state legislator had been instrumental in gaining passage of the primary suffrage bill. Ione Bramlette of Longview replied to one such letter from Cunningham, “Your kind invitation to become a member of the Thomason for Governor Club received and I would gladly join were Mr. Neff not in the race.” Bramlette continued, “I have pledged him my unstinted support …and know him to be well-fitted to the office.” In another letter, Myrtle Powell of Amarillo replied, “Had I had your letter before promising to support Mr. Neff I would…have been amicable to your suggestion.” She added, “I know Mr. Neff personally and did not know Thomason, which shows what the personal touch means.” It is possible that Cunningham simply waited too late to shore

---

21Neff Campaign Card, PNP.
up support for Thomason. Powell’s letter also illustrates how Neff’s status as a Progressive, along with his “personal touch” could translate into support with voters.22

As Neff and the other candidates completed their campaign for the governor’s office, the suffragists concluded their own campaign. Anti-suffragists closely watched the impending gubernatorial race in Texas. Press coverage in The Woman Patriot that billed itself as the newspaper “For Home and National Defense Against Woman Suffrage, Feminism and Socialism,” held out hope to the very end that Bailey and the conservatives would win in Texas. But the political tides were running against them, and they likely knew it. Suffragists, on the other hand, knew that those tides now favored them. The Woman Patriot was countered by The Woman Citizen, the national suffragist paper. The Woman Citizen focused its coverage on the final ratification of the federal suffrage amendment and ignored the Texas governor’s race. Upon Tennessee’s ratification on August 18, The Woman Citizen proclaimed “Victory At Last” and noted, “Equal suffrage…will be part of the basic law of this great democracy within six months.” Cunningham later reminisced, “We had some splendid and inspiring celebrations all over the state. But the ones which thrilled me most…were in the wee villages where we didn’t know that a single suffrage worker lived. And there were many of them.” Thus, Texas women who had already helped nominate one governor, and were amidst nominating a second, would be eligible to elect their first governor in a general election the following November.23

The advent of full woman suffrage did not bode well for Bailey. In fact, the entire campaign did not go well for Bailey. In the county nominating conventions held in early May,

---

22Ione Bramlette to Cunningham, May 16, 1920, Letter, Folder 13, Box 7, Minnie Fisher Cunningham Papers, University of Houston, Houston, Texas; Myrtle Powell to Cunningham, Letter, May 13, 1920, Folder 13, Box 7, Minnie Fisher Cunningham Papers, University of Houston, Houston, Texas.

Bailey’s support was found to be “negligible.” County conventions across the state sent delegates to the state convention that supported the Wilson administration and presumably Progressive policies—Bailey was on the wrong side. Even Bailey’s home of Cooke County, even the very precinct he lived in, rejected him. The effect was such that Bailey returned to Washington, no doubt to confer with his friends there and to lick his wounds. At this point, Bailey probably should have surmised the probable outcome of his endeavor, but he refused to give up. The campaign continued, and the Texas Democratic primary was held on July 25th. The race between Neff and Bailey was close; most reports during the next week gave Bailey a slight lead. Final figures released by the Texas Election Bureau on August 6th, gave Bailey a lead of just 1,852 votes over Neff with Bailey receiving 152,173 votes and Neff 150,321. The results put Bailey and Neff in a run-off election. Despite initially receiving more votes than Neff, Bailey had a problem—Looney and Thomason, the other two Progressive candidates received another 100,000 votes between them and they were out of the race. In the run-off, held August 28th, Neff defeated Bailey by 73,325 votes. The standard-bearer of Texas conservatives had lost.24

With the primary election and the suffrage fight both safely over, Neff joined the suffrage bandwagon. A little more than a week after the primary, suffrage supporters held a celebratory rally in Dallas in the auditorium of the First Baptist Church. Participants included Neff’s former opponent R.E. Thomason, Minnie Fisher Cunningham, Martin M. Crane, and the head of the newly created Texas League of Women Voters, Jessie Daniel Ames. As the new nominee of Texas Democrats for the governor’s office, the presumed governor-elect, and titular head of the

Progressive wing of the party, Neff was bound to speak. He said, “We are here to celebrate the greatest event in human history—the enfranchisement of women.” Neff promised, “while I am Governor of Texas, no backward step will be taken in regard to suffrage.” Neff added, “Woman has the right to be the co-worker of man; she has the right to share his opportunities. Now that she is able to stand by his side, she will make this world a better place in which to live.

Wherever the woman goes, her influence for good is always felt.” A careful read of the above statement reveals an interesting combination of the biblical role of woman as man’s helpmate along with the Progressive ideals of woman’s equality with men. Texas’ next governor would indeed, as Neff suggested, be bearing in mind the role of the Bible in “the making of our society.” It should be noted that the women mentioned went on to great things. Cunningham was respected by politicians and became the first Texas woman to run for the United States Senate in 1928. Ames founded and ran the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching. Pennybacker eschewed political office but went on to serve as president of the Women’s Club of the Chautauqua Institute as well as the national General Federation of Women’s Clubs.25

Some sent congratulatory letters immediately upon Neff’s nomination, on the assumption that unless he died or met some other unfortunate circumstance, he would become governor. Others waited until Neff was formally elected in November to send their congratulations. In either event, they poured into Neff’s office from friends, acquaintances, and colleagues. One such letter came from Claudia Hightower of the WCTU. Hightower wrote, “Never in the history

of Texas has there been an election of their chief executive, that has been so closely watched, and that as many fervent prayers have gone up, as the one just closed.” Hightower also passed-on a sentiment expressed by her daughter concerning the last election, “Right must triumph over wrong.” About the same time, Neff received a letter from Eunice Buchanan of the TFWC. Buchanan began her letter, “My Dear Next Governor, Yesterday I voted for the first time in my life…for you. This early Sabbath morning, I correctly congratulate Texas.” Buchanan’s sentiment was no doubt felt by many other Texas women, and the fact that she took time on Sunday morning to write the letter reveals the depth of the sentiment. Florence C. Floore, president of the TFWC, also expressed her feelings. She wrote, “Texas is to be congratulated in her choice of a conscientious, Progressive citizen for governor. The club women of the state are glad that the man to occupy the chair of chief executive is on with an intelligent sympathy in their work for the welfare of our women and children.” Floore spoke for Texas’s Progressive clubwomen, and perhaps many others.26

Neff also received some rather more entertaining congratulations that he likely enjoyed very much. An example, addressed to J. W. Bailey read, “Election returns indicate that you are very strong both in Germany…. You ought to carry Hell’s Half Acre in Fort Worth and your hometown, Washington D.C. in later returns. Cheer-up, old boy—the ex-Kaiser needs a new hand.” At the bottom of the note, scrawled in Neff’s own hand was the notation, “Copy of one of my Celebrating Messages.” This too, Neff filed away for future reminiscence. With the election over, and good sentiments expressed, Neff spent the remainder of the year preparing for his coming administration.27

26Hightower to Neff, August 31, 1920, PNP; Eunice Buchanan to Neff, August 29, 1920, PNP; Florence Floore to Neff, November 6, 1920, PNP.

27Congratulatory note to Neff, unsigned and undated, PNP.
Neff’s campaign for governor and his subsequent election reflected the turbulent political realities of the time. In the three years prior to Neff’s election, Texas politics had run the gamut. Conservatives experienced victories in 1916 by controlling the Texas Democratic Party’s platform committee and with the election of James E. Ferguson as governor. In 1917, Progressives took on Ferguson in the “University Fight” and then led successful impeachment proceedings against him. The successes of the woman suffrage movement in Texas during 1918 and 1919 indicated growing strength for Progressives. Neff’s campaign for governor and the final push for the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment were concurrent; women gained the right to vote just barely in time to participate in Neff’s election. As Neff ran for governor in 1920, nothing was clear politically. Women may or may not have gotten the right to vote by that November. It appeared that Progressives probably held the political upper hand; but conservatives were still very strong. The five-way race for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination was going to be tight. Neff knew the main contest was going to be among the Progressives; Bailey was a known quantity among conservatives. Neff won because he was, relatively speaking, the more conservative of the Progressive candidates. His strategy with reference to women reflects this; he courted the more conservative clubwomen and ignored suffragists until they could vote. Once women could vote, Bailey was through. At election time, Neff stood squarely in the “middle” of the crowd—a good example of a Southern Progressive.
CHAPTER 7
AN OMINOUS BEGINNING—1921

For nearly one hundred years Texas has been a potent factor in the political affairs of men....Texas cannot live alone. The states of our union, even the nations of the earth are interdependent....The human race is passing through a period of transition....These are testing times. Big problems confront us.

--Pat M. Neff

For Texas, and the nation, 1921 marked the end of the Progressive Era under Woodrow Wilson and the beginning of Warren G. Harding’s “Normalcy.” The transition, as Neff indicated, did not come particularly quickly or easily for Texans. As the state’s 1920 gubernatorial election showed, Texas Progressives were disinclined to go along with a move to a more conservative agenda such as Harding proposed. But, as in the rest of the nation, conservative forces were gathering strength in Texas—the mood of the state was changing. More importantly, the brand of conservatism that was growing in the state was not of the “kinder and gentler” variety but was more often that of the harder, more sinister kind. The most ominous development was the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan in the state just one month before Neff’s inauguration. Rural conservatives were becoming increasingly vocal, while urban Progressives continued their pursuit of Wilsonian ideals. Labor problems seemed to be an increasing threat as evidenced by the ongoing strike of Galveston’s longshoreman and the continuing wage cuts amongst the nation’s railroad workers. The East Texas oil boom was causing rapid growth of towns such as Mexia. Because of all of these factors, Texas politics and society became increasingly more divisive during this period. Neff had the misfortune of taking office during a time of contentious, and often violent, change.
When Neff took office on January 18, 1921, he could not have known the harrowing path he was about to follow. Fiscal shortfalls and the state of Texas Democratic Party politics made Progressive reform a difficult proposition. Growing labor and social unrest only complicated matters for the novice governor. The 37th Legislature of the State of Texas convened shortly after the inaugural and provided Neff’s first personal and political challenge. During the first six months of his term, Neff’s inexperience was evident especially in his dealings with the legislature. Traditionally, Texas governors use their inaugural addresses to provide a legislative agenda at the beginning of the session. Neff, however, did not do this but instead promulgated a series of special messages to the legislature that were frequently confusing. In the first of these messages, issued on January 20, Neff wrote, “We are here, I am ready for my part of the work that brings us here…I realize full well that teamwork is necessary…Our first business at hand is to redeem the pledges made by us to the people.” Neff then offered the Texas Democratic Party platform, which was generally vague but included blanket approval of the Wilson administration as well as support for the League of Nations, as a basis for action. According to the new governor, “All party platforms should be carefully considered and faithfully followed.” Thus, Neff’s first message to the legislature left it to its own devices, and his failure to provide strong direction soon led to problems.1

The *Dallas Morning News* found the message “notable for its brevity” and further noted that it was probably “the shortest official paper of its kind that ever marked the outlining of a governor’s policy.” Within a few days those familiar with Austin’s inner workings found

1Norman Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug*, 12; “Democratic State Platform Adopted,” *DMN*, September 9, 1920. (This includes the complete text of the 1920 Platform of the Texas Democratic Party); “Neff’s Message is with Legislature,” *DMN*, January 21, 1921; The text of Neff’s message was reprinted in the *Dallas Morning News* which is cited here. All of Neff’s official messages to the legislature also appear in *House Journal* and *Senate Journal* for the appropriate session, in this case the Regular Session of the Thirty-Seventh legislature. Newspapers or the Neff papers may be cited as sources for Neff’s messages as original copies of both journals are fragile and not always available.
themselves puzzled in regards to exactly what Neff’s program was and began to clamor for answers. One seasoned observer noted that, “The governor, from the statements of those who have sought him, not to impress him with their views, but to give him an opportunity to express his views to them on legislation,” find him to be remarkably “calm” and “reticent.” The observer likened Neff’s reliance on the party platform as a legislative guide to the “man who could not remember the Lord’s Prayer and hung at the foot of his bed and pointed to it when he retired.” The observer also noted, however, that by not presenting an overall wish list of legislation, the governor did not expose himself to the stigma of failure if the legislature did not approve his policies. Neff’s approach was instead to submit his policies to the legislature item by item. By doing so, Neff was able to “fight the legislature on items, and not general policies.” The observer concluded that if Neff’s actions were deliberate, it was the “shrewdest thing ever done by a governor of this state.”

Though Neff’s approach may have indeed been deliberate, it was much too subtle for Texas legislators. Within a week, Neff began to offer more concrete proposals for the legislature’s consideration. In a message to the legislature that was rife with Progressive rhetoric on efficient government, Neff wrote, “The Government belongs to the people. You and I represent the people. We should conduct their government economically and efficiently or resign.” With that, Neff suggested a series of proposals to streamline and improve Texas government. These included the consolidation of several state agencies, including the Pure Food Department and the Health Department. The governor also suggested placing the state Mining Board and mines inspectors under the Department of Labor, and all state agriculture stations, as well as anything connected with the pursuit of agricultural knowledge, under the auspices of the

---

Texas A&M College at College Station. Neff also proposed the widening of the state
Department of Agriculture to encompass all regulation of those interests in the state. Neff also
proposed the outright abolition of the State Parole Board and the Industrial Welfare Board.
Observers noted that Neff “was seriously wounded where he has not killed outright” and that “he
has not sheathed his knife, but has stopped only for a moment to whet it on his boot.” The
challenge was to fund these Progressive minded agencies amid declining revenues following the
post-war recession. ³

Neff then turned his attention to the increasingly pressing issue of law and order in
another message to the legislature dated February 1, 1921. Neff’s message began, “the law is the
stabilizing influence which holds society together. It is the foundation of every civilization. To
uphold it is the first duty of a government.” The governor’s first suggestion was for the repeal of
the state’s suspended sentence law that frequently allowed criminals to serve less time than
originally sentenced. This was rooted in Neff’s experience as a county attorney, as he felt the
legal system was often too lenient. Next, the governor took aim at law enforcement officers
engaged in criminal activity. Neff wrote, “I remind you that at times local officers who are
sworn to enforce the law, corruptly stand in the way of its enforcement.” He then called for a
legal means to remove those officers. Finally, the governor called for an amendment to the Dean
Law, which governed state prosecution of prohibition violations, to allow purchasers of alcoholic
beverages to testify against sellers. Neff also addressed the issue of lawlessness that was then
growing in the state as he noted, “When a government ceases to enforce her laws, it ceases to be
a government and becomes a mob.” Neff would spend the next four years dealing with

³“Message to the Senate and House of Representatives,” January 27, 1921, PNP; The state archives
Records of the Governor are limited exclusively to Neff’s official business mostly related to maintaining his office
and the executive mansion. The vast majority of Neff’s gubernatorial records are housed in Baylor University’s
Texas Collection and include correspondence both official and personal as well as duplicates of many official
messages and speeches; “Neff Believes in Action from Start,” DMN, January 28, 1921.
lawlessness and mob violence—and the problem was to grow much worse. These proposals formed the basis of Neff’s legislative program for the session and were the focus of his interest.⁴

By the end of February, open conflict threatened between the governor and the legislature due to a lack of progress on Neff’s suggested legislation as well as on the appropriation bills. As of the 26th, the state legislature had only passed one of Neff’s bills, that being the consolidation of the Pure Food and Drug Department with the state Health Department. The governor had not signed any major legislation, and the state legislature had not passed any of the appropriation bills. Time was running out for the regular legislative session. Meanwhile, the House of Representatives voted to adjourn on March 12, citing the need of several members to go home. Also on the 26th, Senate leadership informed the governor of the need for a special session, as the Senate Finance Committee did not have enough time to consider the three appropriation bills. By the end of January, state legislators introduced 304 bills in the House and 143 in the Senate. In addition nineteen joint resolutions had been passed. Only five bills were submitted to the governor for approval. So, as the regular session ended, the legislature had still not fulfilled its main purpose of appropriating the state’s funds, and Governor Neff threatened to bring it back into session immediately upon adjournment to do so.⁵

On February 23, the amendment of the Dean Law for prohibition enforcement failed in the house. The governor was not pleased that one of his pet bills went down to defeat in the regular session. According to Neff, “The defeat of this bill is the greatest victory for the bootlegger and lawless element of Texas. The action of the House by its vote practically wiped

---

⁴“[Message] To the Members of the Senate and House of Representatives,” February 1, 1921, PNP.
⁵“Neff’s Break With House Threatened,” DMN, February 26, 1921; “House Votes to Quit March 12,” DMN, February 26, 1921; “Bills Signed by Governor,” DMN, February 27, 1921; “Governor is Told of Senate Plans,” DMN, February 26, 1921; “Busy Week Ahead of Legislature; Big Issues to Come Up,” Austin Statesman [Hereinafter cited as AS], January 30, 1921.
off the books and made ineffective the prohibition law. As governor, I thought this broken link in the law should be mended. The members of the House did not think so.” Neff lamented, “Lawlessness seems to have the right of way these days in Texas.” The governor’s comment raised the ire of some representatives and did not improve the increasingly confrontational relationship between the executive and legislative branches. Representative Sid Crumpton of Bowie complained that the governor’s comments were “unjust” and that he had been “classed with the other sixty members as standing in the way of legislation in Texas.” Representative Grover C. Morris of Medina, who was a co-sponsor, even voted against it. Morris referred to the possibility of the bill allowing the admittance of hearsay evidence. Morris said, “I am unwilling to see a man charged with a felony to be convicted on the unsupported evidence of a co-defendant or a co-felon.” In an editorial, the *Dallas Morning News* probably expressed the thoughts of many by observing, “Governor Neff has shown more petulance than wisdom in his comments on the refusal of the House to pass the bill.” The editors felt the governor was exaggerating the importance of the bill and was just upset at its failure, which was likely correct.6

Despite any resentment over policy, the real point of contention between Neff and the legislature was the lack of progress on the appropriation bills. Neff believed that it was the legislature’s constitutional to complete its work within the allotted time. Neff’s threat to reconvene the legislature immediately after adjournment caused some uproar. Many legislators were simply anxious to return to their homes and businesses after a two-month absence. Others saw Neff’s threat as an insult to the notion of equality of the executive and legislative branches. One of these was Senator R. M. Dudley of El Paso, who was also chairman of the Senate

Finance Committee. Dudley said, “I have been impressed with the idea...that there are three branches of government in Texas—the executive, legislative, and judicial. I do not know of any legislator who is attempting to suggest to the executive.” Dudley felt that Neff was rushing the legislature in its duties, especially its consideration of appropriations, and was not paying due respect to the institution. According to Dudley, “The biennial appropriation of the people’s money has become so large, and there are so many interests to be conserved, it is our earnest desire to conserve all of them with equal fairness. This, naturally, is no small feat.”

Dudley’s observation is an important one that many of his contemporaries did not understand, possibly including even Neff. By the end of the Progressive Era in 1920, demands for public services and infrastructure had grown, and it required considerable attention by the legislature to make appropriations. In addition, appropriations had begun to exceed available revenues. Dudley, as a seasoned legislator, probably realized this. Neff, who had not been in state politics for several years, may well have not. Budget shortfalls were a continuing problem throughout Neff’s administration. Nevertheless, by the end of the session, relations between the governor and the legislature were strained. Though legislators made a last minute push to pass legislation, many bills died in committee, including the appropriation bills. Furthermore, Neff’s “so-called moral reform bills” were also among the casualties. The failure of the regular session probably was the result of several factors. One of these may have been Neff’s own inexperience. By failing to offer the legislature strong guidance at the beginning of the session, he may have prompted it to consider too many pieces of legislation and fail to concentrate on budgetary concerns. Conservatives’ obstruction of Progressive legislation may also have been a factor. In

---

7“No Chance of Curtailing Session of Legislature: Dudley Rebukes Attempt to Dictate to Solons,” AS, February 26, 1921.
any case, the governor made a peace offering by agreeing not to call a special session before
June 1.8

As Neff and the legislature struggled over legislation, “lawlessness” became an
increasing problem. Unfortunately, this phenomenon was not limited to the usual elements of
society but also manifested itself at several levels in the form of lynching and other mob
violence, unrest among the Ku Klux Klan and labor, and in some cases, even among those
charged with enforcing the law. In such situations, minorities often were the targets. In
February, Salvador Saucedo, a Mexican national, was arrested for the murder of Mary Schroeder
an American woman with whom he was acquainted. Schroeder’s mutilated body had been found
along a road near Hondo and showed signs of rape. Police searched for Saucedo at the homes of
his parents and, upon arrest, he was placed in the Cameron County Jail. Tragically, Saucedo
died while in custody. Naturally, there was concern in the Mexican immigrant and Mexican-
American communities. The Mexican government expressed its concern to the State Department
about the conditions under which its citizens were held in Texas jails. Upon the request of
Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, Governor Neff ordered an investigation of the Saucedo
incident. Shortly thereafter, Sheriff W.T. Vann reported that Saucedo had been killed trying to
escape. This ended the episode but the remaining uncertainties of the case illustrate the state of
society at the time. Had Saucedo been arrested merely because he was Mexican? Had he truly
escaped, or had he been killed by “lawless” police for killing a white woman? Or, had he
escaped out of fear of lynching? Texas was on the precipice of social chaos.9

8“Solons Speed Up in Closing Hours,” DMN, March 11, 1921; “Neff Not to Call Special Session Before
June 1, DMN, March 26, 1921.

9“Sobre El Asesinato Y Crimen Cometido En S. Saucedo,” Epoca, April 3, 1921, “Se Pone En Claro Como
Fue Asesinado S. Saucedo Cerca De Rio Hondo Fue Sacado,” Prensa, March 9, 1921; “Informa el Consul Mexicano
Sobre la Muerte de Saucedo,” El Imparcial de Texas, March 17, 1921; “Se Rinde Un Informe Sobre La Muerte De
Salvador Saucedo El Sheriff Vann dice que,” Prensa, April 9, 1921.
In early May, Neff returned his attention to legislation and announced his intention to call the special session in mid-July, tentatively on the 11th. The date chosen was some three weeks later than most expected. When a reporter asked Neff why he had chosen to convene the session in the middle of the summer, he joked, “I tried to get the hottest day in the hottest month of the year.” Then Neff offered that he had considered many dates but had concluded the 11th to be the most convenient for a majority of legislators. According to the governor, the session would consider law enforcement measures, reform laws, departmental consolidations, general economy, education, and finally, the appropriation bills. To complicate matters, the State Comptroller’s Office announced, just before the session met, that the state had a $4 million revenue shortfall. Neff addressed the issue of the state’s finances in a speech two days before the special session convened. The governor explained, “The present state ad valorem [property] tax rate is twenty-two cents on the one hundred dollars. This will produce in tax money for next year $5.8 million …the highest tax rate possible under our constitution is thirty-five cents on the one hundred dollars. This will produce $9 million.” The governor warned, “Taxes from other sources … will amount to about $6 million. When we take out of the treasury the money appropriated by the regular session …we will lack five million dollars.” So, as the special session began, Neff and the legislature again faced a busy session.¹⁰

Shortly after the session began, the rift between Neff and Senator Dudley reappeared. In a swipe aimed at the governor, Dudley made the point that had the legislature passed the appropriations bills in the regular session, decreasing revenues would have left the state in serious financial trouble that would be averted by passing the bills later in the year. Meanwhile, other legislators had problems with Neff’s policies and methods. Many were upset at Neff’s

unsubstantiated blanket charges of “wholesale graft” in state government. Because of all of this, several of Neff’s supporters in the House proposed a resolution expression of confidence in the governor. To his credit, Neff was more interested in results than expressions of goodwill aimed toward himself. In a letter to one of the bill’s sponsors, Representative James Rogers, Neff wrote, “The Legislature was not convened in special session to discuss me. I am not a legislative problem. I am standing for economy in the administration of the government and for the enforcement of the law and against government graft in sums both large and small.” For good measure, Neff added, “It seems to me that instead of continuing a discussion of things of a personal and political nature, it would be much better to get right down to business and pass the laws for which the legislature assembled. If the withdrawal of the resolution will assist in accomplishing this purpose, it would please me very much to have you withdraw it.” Rogers and company respected Neff’s request and withdrew the bill. Despite feelings of ill will, the legislature continued its work.11

One of the major sources of controversy during this session was a bill sponsored by Representative Wright Patman of Cass County condemning the Ku Klux Klan. Patman and nine other representatives signed the resolution condemning the work of masked bands of vigilantes. The bill resulted in spirited debate on the floor of the House between supporters and opponents of the Klan. Governor Neff supported the bill, though he never mentioned the organization by name. Neff stated that he supported legislation aimed at “secret organizations organized for the purpose of masking and disguising themselves and violating the laws of this state by inflicting punishment upon persons against whom no legal complaint has been filed.” The governor added

11Neff to James Rogers, July 28, 1921, PNP; “Clouds Hovering over Legislature,” DMN, July 20, 1921; “Neff Called Upon to Prove Charges,” DMN, July 20, 1921; “Governor Submits Message on Graft,” DMN, July 21, 1921; Neff’s graft charges were investigated by a House committee and found to be without merit. The governor testified in the proceedings.
that he was an “advocate of law enforcement” and supported any strengthening of the law that the legislature “may deem necessary.” Despite Neff’s apparent approval, the bill did not pass.\footnote{Nine Representatives Sign Resolution Denouncing Work of Masked Bands,” \textit{AS}, July 24, 1921; “Klan Debate Stirs House,” \textit{AS}, July 25, 1921; “Governor Neff Paves Way for Anti-Masker Legislation, \textit{AS}, August 1, 1921; Patman authored bills to prohibit the wearing of masks in public as well as the bill denouncing the Klan. Neither bill passed.}

On August 6, with just eight working days left in the special session, Neff submitted his final message to the legislature. He proposed seventeen additional matters, all of a minor nature, for consideration. These included such trivial matters as the format of poll tax receipts which probably struck many as being outside the realm of the governor’s responsibility. At the same time, Neff refused to call a second special session. However, he also allowed that he did not want consideration of these new proposals, or those he had submitted earlier, to get in the way of the appropriation bills. Over the course of the next few days, legislators did just that and concentrated on appropriations. Despite meeting until midnight, legislators were not able to complete their work. The final sticking point was the educational appropriation bill for the state’s colleges and universities.\footnote{Governor Submits his Final Message,” \textit{DMN}, August 7, 1921; “Neff Makes it Plain He will not Request Second Extra Session,” \textit{DMN}, August 7, 1921; “Progress is Shown in Both Houses,” \textit{DMN}, August 9, 1921; “House Rejects Report on Educational Bill by Vote of 66 to 58,” \textit{DMN}, August 17, 1921.}

As promised, Neff reconvened the legislature immediately to deal with the final appropriation bill. Many of the legislators assumed that the education appropriation would be passed and arranged to go home. They were disappointed—as was Governor Neff. According to one account, “It was apparent that the chief executive was not pleased with the situation and hesitated to call another session. However upon being pressed he told those present that they had better not go home as they would have to come back soon.” An editorial of the \textit{Austin Statesman} noted that the legislators could not be blamed as circumstance and the many proposals of the governor had given them “enough to exercise a ‘Long Parliament’.” In an interesting aside, nine
members of the House, who opposed the bill, resorted to a favorite delaying tactic of Texas legislators—they hid. After the men came up missing in a quorum call, the Sergeant-at-Arms and the Travis County Sheriff were instructed to find them. Their efforts included a late-night car chase through the streets of downtown Austin. The men were rounded up and the legislators continued their work.\textsuperscript{14}

The convening of the second special session of the 37\textsuperscript{th} Texas Legislature strained relations between its members and the executive. In a speech on the floor of the House, Representative J. Roy Hardin of Kaufman criticized the governor for failing to provide legislators with proper information to make decisions. Hardin said, “What does he do when members…go to him for information? He dodges the question.” Then Hardin added, “He has assumed an air of patronizing superiority and is playing to the political galleries of Texas.” Neff watched Hardin calmly from the rear of the chamber as he leaned back in a chair. Neff himself came under pressure not to use his veto power on the remaining bills, but instead to use his “blue pencil” or line item veto. Many of Neff’s friends including Annie Webb Blanton, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, pleaded with the governor not to “throw things back to the legislature and have the bickering, quarrels, and delays” that had so marked the session. When the legislature finally passed the education appropriation on the 25\textsuperscript{th}, Neff took Blanton’s advice and went to work with his “blue pencil.” In the end, Neff and the legislature did the best they could under difficult fiscal conditions.\textsuperscript{15}


http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbl16; Blanton was elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1918 making her the first Texas woman elected to statewide office.
While the legislature had been at work, the Ku Klux Klan gathered strength and influence. This concerned many Texans, as indicated by Representative Patman’s work during the session. By mid-1921, the Klan was a pervasive influence on the political and social life of Texans. Its rise and growth in the state almost exactly coincided with Neff’s rise to power. The new Klan came to Texas in September of 1920 with the arrival of Z. R. Upchurch, an emissary from Klan headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. Upchurch’s mission was two-fold; he acted as a representative to the annual meeting of the United Confederate Veterans and evaluated Texas’s suitability as an outpost of the “Invisible Empire.” In October, the Klan established its first chapter in Texas in Houston, and over the course of the next year, spread throughout the state. Once the Klan was entrenched in Texas, it grew rapidly. During Neff’s term of office, the Klan sought to impose its moral values and political power on the state. According to historian Charles C. Alexander, “To the Klan, reform meant preserving or restoring the status-quo. To reverse changes wrought by Progressive reform as well as the shift from rural to urban values.” As a result, the Klan was a bastion of radical conservatism and was a major source of opposition to Progressive politicians like Neff.\footnote{Charles C. Alexander, \textit{The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest} (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965.), 36-9; David Chalmers, \textit{Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan}, (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 39, 44-5; Chalmers offers an entire chapter on Texas and is not flattering of Neff. Alexander focuses on the Klan in southwestern states and gives greater treatment of Texas.}

As 1921 progressed, news items about the Klan or incidents attributed to it steadily increased, as did public interest in the organization. In January, Imperial Wizard William J. Simmons revealed his plans for the organization. According to one account, the revived Klan was to be a “ritualistic fraternal order, organized along semi-military lines” and was devoted to “keeping forever the government of the United States in the hands of native-born American citizens.” In addition, the organization was to be “thoroughly organized and a somewhat prosaic...
business organization.” Thus, the base for the new Klan was on vaguely noble, yet somewhat dubious, ideals and designed to be a large moneymaking venture. Many older people remembered, sometimes fondly, the previous organization. Charles L. Martin, a Texas newspaperman, was among those who recalled the Klan of the old days. Martin said, “I can conceive of no purpose . . . no necessity for a revival of the Ku Klux Klan.” Martin apparently did not think much of the new Klan as he proclaimed it “an imitation affair, in no sense, of the same nature or characteristics of the original.” With increased incidence of lynching and mob justice, curiosity about the Klan continued in Texas.17

The sheer prevalence of the Klan in daily life drove this increased curiosity. Many businesses featured Klan-themed advertising. The Southern Pacific Railroad published an ad with the catch-line of “Klean, Kool, Komfortable.” One Dallas menswear store published an ad featuring a hooded and robed cartoon figure. It is not clear in the ad whether the store actually sold hoods and robes. Meanwhile, the D. W. Griffith film about the Klan, “Birth of a Nation,” made return engagements in Texas theaters. In Austin, another film entitled “The Face at Your Window- A Dramatic Story of the Ku Klux Klan” played at the Hippodrome. Still another film, “Mysterious Eyes of the Ku Klux Klan,” which purported to show the “inside workings of the Klan,” played in Houston. A series of articles on the organization that appeared in the Dallas Morning News in the fall further indicated the intense interest in the Klan. The exposé originally appeared in the New York World and won the 1921 Pulitzer Prize for journalism. The series included such inside information as the group’s secret handshake, complete with photo illustrations. One article contained excerpts from the organization’s handbook, the “Kloran,” that detailed its pledges and ceremonies. In response to criticism, the Klan also published a one-

page ad in the *Dallas Morning News* disavowing violent acts by its members. In the summer of 1921, the Klan seemed to be everywhere in Texas one looked.\textsuperscript{18}

By July, citizens reported Klan-related incidents on an almost daily basis from around the state. Many people were kidnapped and beaten for various moral infractions. In Lufkin, Earl H. Peters was seized by four men and tarred and feathered after failing to heed a warning to leave town. This was the second such incident in Lufkin in twenty-four hours. Another man, W. J. McKnight of Timpson, was reportedly tarred and feathered twice within five days; first for crossing the Klan, twice for not leaving town. The prevalence of incidents like this raised the concerns of many Texans. Though many, as evidenced by its growth, supported the Klan in its efforts to clean up the state’s moral values, many others considered it a danger to organized society. In Neff’s hometown of Waco, eighty of the town’s leading citizens signed a petition stating opposition to the “practices of the present-day Ku Klux Klan.” The petition stated that the Klan was “subversive of constitutional government and civil liberty, and we pledge our moral support to our officers in their efforts to protect citizens against the unlawful violence of such organizations.”\textsuperscript{19}

Many citizens were also concerned about the possible involvement of their elected officials with the organization. By this time, the pervasiveness of the Klan was such that public officials could hardly avoid addressing the issue. This was especially true of the governor. Publicly, Neff avoided direct references to the Klan, as he probably realized its growing power


\textsuperscript{19}“Lufkin Men Given Tar and Feathers,” *DMN*, July 21, 1921; “McKnight Tarred at Timpson,” *DMN*, July 21, 1921; “Petition is Circulated at Waco Against Ku Klux,” *DMN*, July 23, 1921.
and influence. But Neff was not entirely afraid to address the issue, being concerned with what he often termed as "lawlessness" or "mob rule." In an open letter to McLennan County officials investigating Klan activities there, Neff wrote, "The law can and should by enforced only through the duly constituted authorities…No individual and no organization, however large, should be above the law." Neff never mentioned the Klan by name, but his allusion is obvious. This began a pattern for Neff throughout his tenure that often led to questions about the governor’s stand in reference to the organization.\(^{20}\)

Privately, Neff and his friends talked more openly about the Klan. In a letter from George W. Barcus, Neff’s friend, confidant, and former campaign manager, the governor’s personal opinion is more obvious. Barcus wrote:

> Since you were here last week, the K.K.K. has been discussed considerable [sic] locally as well as in the state press. You asked what I thought of you making a statement with reference to the matter. I have changed my views on the question. At that time, I thought it would be best to follow your policy of silence. …there is such a constant demand to know where you stand and your silence is being taken as an endorsement, I fear of the Klan. In my judgment, you should come out with a good, strong statement …that you as governor, are not only opposed to mob law in any form, but are opposed to any form of government that attempts to destroy the government. If necessary, I would call the legislature to stop these parades and the activities of the Klan …\(^{21}\)

This passage is important for two reasons. First, it specifically refers to, and reveals, the governor’s “policy of silence” regarding the Klan. Second, it puts to rest the notion that Neff was a supporter of the Ku Klux Klan.

By the fall of 1921, with the legislative session over, Neff probably thought the rest of the year would pass without requiring his services. But, one more trouble spot had been developing since his election. On November 19, 1920, drillers struck oil in the town of Mexia, located approximately thirty miles east of Waco. The town had been the center of drilling activity for

\(^{20}\)"Neff Wants Laws Enforced Legally," *DMN*, October 12, 1921.

\(^{21}\)George W. Barcus to Neff, October 11, 1921, PNP.
over a year. In succeeding months, speculators and job seekers swamped the town. By mid-year, Mexia was the center of busy growth and steadily increasing oil production. By September oil lease deals in the Mexia area totaled over a million dollars. Leases changed hands quickly between speculators. Thousands flocked to the town, and it became crowded beyond capacity. By late 1921, Mexia had become a boomtown with all that entailed especially the bootlegging and “lawlessness” that Neff reviled.22

The town’s growth was truly phenomenal, from a population of “a few thousand” to about 30,000 in a year. Though the Mexia city leaders had to have been pleased with the town’s growth, they may have exacerbated the town’s problems by over-promoting it. In October the Mexia Chamber of Commerce ran an advertisement in the *Dallas Morning News* that proclaimed, “There is no place in the United States like Mexia.” The ad touted real estate opportunities and “fortunes for those outside the oil game.” About a month later, the chamber ran another ad stating “Mexia Has Done It.” This ad touted Mexia’s success in going through “the first stages of a real oil boom without a scar.” According to this ad, over five million people had visited the area, more than fifty million dollars had been spent on oil investments, and more than a million dollars worth of new construction had come to the town. Nevertheless, a week later the town apparently entered the second stage of the oil boom because the chamber seemed to change its mind. On November 27, the chamber ran another ad that was a “Labor Warning.” It stated, “If you are without funds and seeking work, don’t come to Mexia this winter” and further noted “we have more workers than there is work to be done.” By the end of the year, the

---

town had outgrown its infrastructure and the ability of its law enforcement officers to maintain control—and the governor would soon have to step in.\textsuperscript{23}

As 1921 drew to a close, an event occurred that gave warning of what Neff was to face in the coming year—labor problems and racial violence. On December 2, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America ordered a nationwide strike. The strike affected some 2,000 workers at the Armour and Swift Companies’ plants in Fort Worth. The strike had barely gotten started when violence broke out. On December 6, there was a clash between strikers and non-union workers as the latter left work at the Armour and Company plant in Fort Worth. Accounts of the incident indicate that two men accosted Fred Rouse, a black strikebreaker, as he left work. Rouse then apparently drew a pistol and shot two brothers, Tom and Tracy Maclin. Tom Maclin was seriously wounded, and the other strikers gathered around, stabbed, and beat Rouse until they thought he was dead. The strikers allowed local police to remove Rouse from the scene and take him to a hospital for treatment. On the 11\textsuperscript{th}, a mob of thirty unmasked men took Rouse from the hospital. His body was found hanging from a tree, riddled with bullets, some thirty minutes later. About a week later, strikers in Forth Worth reached a picketing agreement that significantly reduced the likelihood of violence. Thus, no one asked Neff to use state force in the strike; however, the incident illustrates the atmosphere of both racial and labor relations in Texas at the time.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{23} “Mexia is Meeting Civic Problems,” \textit{DMN}, November 27, 1921; Mexia Chamber of Commerce, Advertisements, \textit{DMN}, October 16, 1921, November 20, 1921, November 27, 1921.

\textsuperscript{24} “Strike of Packer Employees Ordered,” \textit{DMN}, December 2, 1921; “Strike Order Does Not Alarm Packers,” \textit{DMN}, December 3, 1921; “Negro Shoots Strikers and is Severely Beaten by Mob in Fort Worth,” \textit{DMN}, December 7, 1921; “Negro Who Shot Maclins Lynched,” \textit{DMN}, December 12, 1921; See also W. Fitzhugh Brundage, \textit{Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Brundage’s work is an in depth analysis of the phenomenon of lynching—its victims, causes, impact, and opponents. Brundage finds lynching rooted in the Southern tradition of violent labor control and racial and mob violence. Events like that recounted here reinforce Brundage’s assertions. Other similar events during the Railroad Shopmen’s strike, to be discussed later, do as well.
Neff received one letter from attorney G. E. Hamilton of Matador that neatly expressed the governor’s situation at the end of 1921. Hamilton began, “With much interest I have watched the row the legislature has tried to stir up with you. It strikes me the greatest trouble these mad members that made extravagant appropriations…without ever looking up the facts to ascertain if there were any way to pay them.” With reference to the Klan, Hamilton wrote, “I notice there is considerable sentiment among the members for you to submit to them the subject of legislating against the K. K. K. Of course I do not know as well as you…However, it occurs to me that the present criminal laws have not been framed…to suppress this kind of lawlessness.” Generally, during 1921, Neff had a rocky relationship with the legislature and had difficulty getting legislation passed. As Hamilton pointed out, the state had serious budgetary problems that continued throughout Neff’s tenure. The Ku Klux Klan was a growing menace in the state, and its pervasive presence and violent extra-legal tactics provoked much controversy. Though Hamilton made no mention of them, labor problems and the situation in Mexia constituted other potential sources of trouble for the governor. Hamilton concluded his letter with the following, “Wishing for you the greatest amount of peace possible in your trying position and trusting you will never reach the place that you will be forced to admit as one of your predecessors did, that, ‘Being Governor of Texas is not just one damn thing after another, but is one damn thing all the time.’” Hamilton could not have known how fitting his sentiment was or just how much Neff would need good luck in 1922.25

Generally, Neff’s own inexperience hampered his first year in office, which resulted in a rocky relationship with the legislature. Very little in the way of Progressive reform was made during the 37th legislature and it was marked by the fight to balance the budget. Neff’s

25G. E. Hamilton to Neff, July 23, 1921, PNP, (Hamilton’s quote was unattributed.).
experience in dealing with the legislature resulted in a more practical approach with the next legislature set to meet in 1923. It was probably just as well that the governor did not have to worry about a legislative session in 1922. By the middle of 1921, Neff’s attentions, like nearly everyone else’s, began to focus on mob violence, the growth of the Ku Klux Klan, and growing labor and social unrest. For much of the next year, events in Texas careened out of control often moving beyond the ability of the governor to react. Strikes, kidnappings, and lynchings threatened in many locations, often simultaneously. Overall, it was likely a disappointing year for a reform minded Progressive. Neff still needed to grow into his new job and 1922 presented challenges among the very greatest ever encountered by a Texas governor.
A mob has no more right openly to defy the law than has an individual. In the clear light of the law there can be seen on every member of a murderous mob, the scarlet hand of Cain. Lynching is one of the darkest blots on the escutcheon of our society….Every lynching party strikes a death blow at society….Lynchers should be prosecuted.

--Pat M. Neff

In 1922, Pat Neff faced one of the most trying years of any Texas governor. For most of the year, events careened from one crisis to another as political and social problems reached a head. The Ku Klux Klan, which had become pervasive in 1921, became even more active in 1922 as it entered mainstream politics. Kidnappings, floggings, and lynching became commonplace and occurred with a rapidity that defied government action. The East Texas oil boom created boomtowns like Mexia where rapid growth and the rapid rise of gambling, bootlegging, and prostitution demanded state action. Labor problems wracked the nation and state in 1922 and reached a crescendo at mid-year with simultaneous strikes of both the United Mine Workers and the Brotherhood of Railroad Shopmen. The latter put Neff between the union and the Warren G. Harding administration. To complicate matters, the governor found himself in the middle of a re-election campaign at the height of the troubles. Events placed Neff in the awkward position of choosing to support labor like a national Progressive, or supporting management like a pro-business Southern Progressive. Overall, 1922 was a pivotal year in the career of Neff often requiring a deft balance of political subtlety and heavy-handedness. Considering the possibilities, the year either could have made or could have broken the governor.
One of Neff’s most challenging problems during 1922 was “mob violence” or “mob rule.” Racial tensions, resistance to change, and a tendency toward violence triggered instances of mob violence—especially lynching. As governor, Neff’s job was to further the legitimate enforcement of the law over vigilante justice. Often, mob action was attributable to the Klan—but not always. In either case, Texans could not help but notice the increasing frequency with which “lawlessness” was occurring. To other Texans, the return to “normalcy” was equated with a return to a simpler, more conservative, time. The Klan readily embraced this idea, and consequently, many Texans embraced that movement. According to Charles C. Alexander, “To the Klan, reform meant preserving or restoring the status-quo. To reverse changes wrought by progressive and populist reform, as well as the shift from rural values to urban values.”

Alexander adds, that in the case of Texas, “In the fall of 1920, people in Texas…were ready to adapt the Klan to their own needs and use it as a shortcut to political and moral renovation, to the reestablishment of law and order.” By 1922, many conservative Texans harnessed the Klan to advance of their agenda.

Governor Neff began the year on a rather troubling note by announcing that he was too busy to issue the traditional Governor’s New Year’s Greeting to the people of Texas. The Governor cited “pressing business” that required “immediate attention.” Neff’s pressing business was the increasing lawlessness in the oil boomtown of Mexia. At the same time, the Meatpacker’s strike was still ongoing and, more importantly, the incidence of mob violence was a near daily occurrence. The year had barely started, and already the governor was “swamped.” The town of Mexia’s meteoric growth over the previous year or so, from a population of 3,000 in

---

Charles C. Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest*, 22-3, 34-5; Not all Texas conservatives turned toward the Klan. Those already in the Democratic Party power structure, such as James Ferguson and Joseph Weldon Bailey wielded enough power and influence without the Klan’s help. Indeed, “Baileyism” and “Fergusonism” were terms often used in political discourse of the time.
1920 to 30,000 by January 1922, resulted in the usual boomtown problems such as the lack of housing and infrastructure, but more troublesome to the good people of Texas, it had led to gambling, prostitution, and violations of the prohibition laws.²

By the beginning of 1922, Mexia showed signs of being out of control. In fact, the town’s law enforcement officers were thought to be part of the problem. According to Neff, “With the fortune hunters came…the gambler, the thief, the thug, pickpocket, burglar, bootlegger . . . , and every other species of the lawless element.” He added that, “houses of infamy and lawlessness” operated “unmolested.” The governor specifically mentioned two of these, the “Winter Garden” and the “Chicken Farm,” which were guarded by men with “high-power” guns and that were known to be frequented by local officials. As a result, Neff sent several undercover Texas Rangers to investigate. He also instructed them to raid both the Winter Garden and the Chicken Farm. Local law enforcement arrested twenty men but none apparently were ever prosecuted. Meanwhile Mexican-American oil workers and their families were targets of violence or threat of it by white workers. Murder, violence, and general lawlessness against local residents and any other convenient target made the situation in Mexia “intolerable.” Here, Neff’s desire as a Progressive to maintain and even use state resources to enforce “order” is apparent. So, after making a personal inspection at Mexia, the governor decided to declare martial law.³

When Neff made the declaration on January 12, it affected parts of Limestone and adjacent Freestone Counties, including the city of Mexia. Governor Neff considered the action as part of a “state-wide campaign” to rid Texas of lawlessness. He placed the enforcement of

²“Neff too Busy to Issue New Year’s Greetings,” *DMN*, January 1, 1922.
martial law in the hands of seven Texas Rangers and forty Texas National Guardsmen of the Fifty-Sixth Cavalry Brigade from Brenham. In issuing the declaration, Neff reasoned there was, “open and flagrant violation of the law… highway robbery is of frequent occurrence accompanied in some cases by the murder of peaceful and law-abiding citizens.” Furthermore, “gambling houses are in full operation day and night, protected by armed men; intoxicating liquors are being openly sold; a multitude of unfortunate women ply their nefarious business in house of ill-fame and the local officers are either unable or unwilling to maintain and enforce the law.” The troops quickly set to work, their jobs having been made easier by the fact that hundreds of probable troublemakers left town on the same train on which the troops arrived. Twenty-eight men were in custody at the end of the first day. Ultimately, according to Neff, more than a thousand witnesses were interviewed, 77 stills were destroyed, 6,000 gallons of alcoholic beverages seized, $5,000 worth of gambling paraphernalia destroyed, and $4,000 worth of narcotics seized. Neff summed up his determination to maintain law and order by saying, “While I am Governor of Texas, no band of criminals will ever take charge of a community as long as a Texas Ranger can pull a trigger.” Clearly, alcohol was a major part of the problem in the Mexia area and Neff as Southern Progressive and prohibitionist intended to stamp it out. As a state official, it was also his duty.4

Undoubtedly, martial law did reduce crime and tame the wild and wooly boomtown that was Mexia. But, not everyone supported the action and many thought it too severe. In a letter to the governor, shortly after the imposition of martial law, J.M. Rieger of Mexia wrote, “The good people here are united in their agreement with your course…Their actions [criminal’s] were in

---

4“Governor Sends Texas Troops to Mexia Field as Martial Law Rules,” DMN, January 13, 1922; “Neff Determined to Run Out Vice,” DMN, January 13, 1922; Records of the Governor: 1921-1925, Texas State Archive and Library, Austin, Texas; “Twenty-eight Prisoners Held at Barracks of Guard Near Mexia,” DMN, January 14, 1922; Neff, 73; “Campaign on Vice to be Continued,” DMN, January 18, 1922.
open defiance of the law. Conditions here are not so bad as they were some months ago.”

Rieger added that there was still “much complaint” in Ranger and Eastland, which were included under martial law. On the other hand, George McQuaid, editor of the Mexia Evening News noted, “The declaration of martial law in Mexia…is nothing short of an outrage. The present situation is indefensible for the reason that the state has ample power through employment of the Rangers.” Rieger concluded that the use of martial law indicated that the “theory of civil law enforcement” was in a “bad way.” Perhaps to temper some of these complaints, the governor called a mass meeting in Mexia for February 18 to formulate a law enforcement plan for the area. Following a town hall meeting presided over by Governor Neff; he lifted martial law on March 1. This entire episode raises the issue of the differences between Progressives. More liberal National Progressives would have been concerned about the limits placed on civil rights; Southern Progressives like Neff would have been more concerned about maintaining order and facilitating business, in this case oil production. Neff’s use of martial law continued to be controversial for the balance of his tenure.5

Meanwhile, mob violence in the form of floggings, kidnappings, and lynching continued. Over the course of 1922, these incidents seemed to occur on an almost daily basis. They appear to have stemmed from a variety of causes. Some were the result of conservatives, often Klansmen, who wished to enforce Victorian morals on hapless transgressors. Others were not the work of these moral enforcers at all, but were the perpetrated by strikers on strikebreakers. Of course, the worst of these were racially based incidents. On several occasions, mobs removed African-American males from jails wishing to hurry-along the cause of justice. These incidents circumvented the power of the state to enforce the law and protect the rights of citizens, and thus

5J. M. Rieger to Neff, PNP; “Editor Terms Martial Law Declaration an Outrage,” DMN, January 14, 1922; “Neff Puts Law Enforcement up to the People of Limestone County,” DMN, February 19, 1922; “Martial Law Ends at 6 A.M. Wednesday,” DMN, February 27, 1922.
placed Governor Neff in the position of having to reassert that power. In March of 1922, McLennan County court indicted two African-American males, Bennie Young and Cooper Johnson, for the murder of W.H Barker, his wife, and a thirteen-year-old boy. County Attorney Frank Tirey requested and received the presence of Rangers during the trial, and the men were guarded by six Rangers and several sheriffs’ deputies throughout the proceedings. Because of Neff’s actions, Young and Johnson were tried by a jury instead of a lynch mob. On this occasion, Neff was able to stay ahead of the mob; that was not always the case.⁶

During 1922, several lynchings occurred in the state. Often, they were savage in nature—at least three involved the burning of the victims. One of these is particularly indicative of the level of social and political strife at the time; the lynching of three men on May 6 in the town of Kirven in Freestone County, part of which had been covered under Neff’s martial law declaration earlier in the year. The town was a frequent scene of trouble. The sheer brutality of the incident was such that the Associated Press picked up by the story and it appeared it papers across the country, especially in Texas. In all likelihood, this is because of the graphic depiction of the incident as originally reported in the *Dallas Morning News* the following day. The episode, in its details, was reminiscent of the lynching of Jesse Washington in Waco a few years before and every bit as repugnant.⁷

According to the *Dallas Morning News*’ account, a mob of some five hundred men dragged the men from the Freestone County Jail at three in the morning. They were being held for the assault and murder of a local seventeen-year-old white girl, Eula Ausley. One of the men, “Snap” Curry had reportedly confessed to the crime. The mob hauled Curry and the other two

---


men, Mose Jones and John Cornish, from the county jail to the town square. The leaders of the mob, who were unmasked, began by forcing Curry to recount his earlier confession. Curry implicated the other two men as well. At that point, while Jones and Cornish watched, Curry was held up while he was mutilated and had his abdomen slashed. He was then chained to a plow, which had been dragged into the square, cordwood and old crates were then heaped around him, and crude oil drenched over him. When informed of his fate, Curry who had been brave all along said, “Go ahead and burn me. I am not afraid. Only burn these other two…too. They are just as guilty as I am.” To which the leader of the mob replied, “So be it, then.” Jones and Cornish, who had by this time themselves been mutilated, watched as Curry burned. Curry’s last words were, “Oh Lord I’m coming home. Goodbye Mr. Otis” [his employer]. The account then states, “As one of the ropes burned through, partly freeing him, his body was seen to writhe and twist. Death came speedily.” Jones and Cornish were then burned in their turn. The News recorded their deaths but not as graphically. Anyone who read this could not help being either deeply outraged or terribly shocked.8

The aftermath of this event reveals much about the political and social climate of the day. The African-American community in Freestone County was upset that a mob thwarted the legal process, and that in all probability two innocent men were killed. Many residents, including Sheriff W.M. Mayo, feared a race war in the county. For this reason, Mayo requested state help. Governor Neff sent two detachments of Texas Rangers to Fairfield, the seat of Freestone County. Neff instructed the Rangers work under Mayo and let him conduct and lead the investigation. In this case, Neff was likely inclined to let local law officers continue to do their jobs as long as there was no indication of their involvement. Investigation of the Kirven lynchings, as was often

8Ibid.
the case, would have faced several obstacles. The perpetrators of the crime were brazen enough to commit it unmasked and in broad daylight—they did not care who saw them. Furthermore, those who had witnessed the crime had good reason to fear brazen killers and were thus unlikely to cooperate with investigators. Three weeks after the Kirven lynching, Neff’s frustration at mob rule became apparent. In a statement to the press, Neff specifically mentioned that nine African-Americans had been lynched in the previous three weeks. The governor noted, “The growing tendency of mob law is indeed a sad commentary on our civilization. Each person accused of a crime has a right to his day in court. To deny him that right is contrary to Anglo-Saxon civilization.” Neff then suggested that the legislature pass laws to prosecute members of lynch mobs in counties outside those in which the crime occurred. Neff added, “All our laws should be enforced through the organized channels of the court.” The legislature never acted on the governor’s suggestion.9

At the time, however, another organization, the Ku Klux Klan, was vying for control either through the pursuit of political office or through the more silent and insidious use of intimidation. One final aspect of the Kirven lynching may show the workings of the “Invisible Empire.” In the weeks following the incident, it was a frequent topic of letters to newspapers. A little more than a week after the lynching, the *Dallas Morning News* received one such letter to the editor. The man, Joseph Kelly of nearby Mexia, was apparently very disturbed by the incident. In the letter, Kelly denounced the barbarity of the event and called for a complete investigation and punishment of the individuals involved. About a week later, the paper received another letter that was either a retraction or a disavowal of the previous letter. In the second letter, Father Joseph H. Kelly, of Mexia wrote, “not only am I not the author, but the writer does

---

not in any way voice my own personal convictions or sentiments in this regard.” In what was no
doubt a genuine sentiment, Kelly added, “I will be grateful if you will likewise publish this letter
in order that those who might have believed me to be the author may be rightly informed.”
Whether or not, the letters were written by the same man, Father Kelly had definitely
experienced some sort of harassment or threat. 10

The Kirven lynchings were a good example of what Texans and their governor faced
daily—violence, intimidation, and near anarchy. On the heels of this terrible incident, Texans
faced another challenge from the Klan, this time at the ballot box. By 1922, the Klan had
become so pervasive in the lives of Texans that it had become almost mainstream. With such
broad acceptance, the Klan was able to prosecute its agenda through normal political channels.
With Texas’ one-party system, many feared that the Klan had co-opted the Democratic Party.
Furthermore, with the Klan’s “invisible” nature, it was impossible to tell who was a member and
who was not. Therefore, during the 1922 election season, a candidate’s potential membership in
the organization was often an issue. This was true in the governor’s race and was even more the
case in the senate primary race between Earle B. Mayfield and former governor James E.
Ferguson. In what has do go down in the annals of political history as one of the worst choices
ever presented to voters, an acknowledged Klansman faced a corrupt, impeached ex-governor.
Neff, of course, had his own problems as he announced his candidacy for reelection on June 3.
The governor was still trying to control the situation in Freestone and Limestone Counties where
an elicit posse had killed two more African-Americans that day. Meanwhile, the country was

10“Inquiry as to Lynchings,” Letter to the Editor, DMN, May 18, 1922; “Priest Disclaims Letter,” Letter to
the Editor, DMN, May 27, 1922.
facing a strike of the Brotherhood of Railroad Shopmen on July 1. In the summer of 1922, Governor Neff had his work cut out for him.\textsuperscript{11}

Under these circumstances, Neff began his reelection campaign on June 3. In a single-party state like Texas, victory in the Democratic primary set for July 22 was tantamount to victory in the fall election. The governor announced his bid for reelection in a press release in which he stated:

While gaining an intimate knowledge of our government, I have at the same time kept in close touch with the people and their conditions...Perhaps I have made mistakes in the past. I doubt not that I shall make mistakes in the future. I have tried to serve the citizenship of the State in the highest and truest sense, and at all times, I have had a clear conscience. If the Democratic voters of Texas feel they can honor me with a second term, I shall deeply appreciate it, and shall continue my efforts in behalf of the welfare of our people.

The governor set his campaign to begin on June 24 with speeches in Lubbock and Plainview. Neff made it known that he intended to “visit and speak to the citizenship of the state during the summer regardless of whether or not he had any opposition.” Neff was often willing to take his case to the people of Texas, and this time was no different. During Neff’s first campaign for the office, he “used every means of travel from a mule to a flying machine” and drove his own car for some 6,000 miles throughout the state. He reported having spoken in thirty-seven counties in which no gubernatorial candidate had ever spoken. In addition, Neff made 850 speeches, having once spoken twenty-one times in three days while campaigning in Dallas and Tarrant Counties. As the governor began his reelection campaign, one had to wonder whether events would allow him to complete it.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11}Charles Alexander, \textit{Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest}, Alexander offers this treatise of the general state of Texas politics in 1922 in Chapter 6.; “Neff Announces for Re-election,” \textit{DMN}, June 4, 1922; “Kirven is Quiet Following Clash,” \textit{DMN}, June 4, 1922.

\textsuperscript{12}“Neff Announces for Reelection,” \textit{DMN}, June 4, 1922; “Neff to Open his Campaign,” \textit{DMN}, June 24, 1922; Pat M. Neff, \textit{The Battles of Peace}, 7-9.
During the 1922 elections, the central issue was the Ku Klux Klan itself. In many ways, these elections represented a battle-royal between conservative forces in the form of Klan-backed Democratic Party candidates and Progressive forces in the form of “citizen’s leagues.” These leagues generally existed in Texas’s urban areas such as Houston, Waco, Dallas, and Fort Worth. By far, the strongest of these was the Dallas County Citizen’s League led by lawyer, and well-known Progressive, Martin M. Crane. The league was established in April 1922, following a mass meeting held in Dallas City Hall Auditorium. Four hundred of Dallas’s most prominent businessmen and professionals signed a petition against the Klan. Crane’s name led the list. According to the petition, “Recent events constitute our excuse for this call. Some of our citizens have been driven from the communities in which they live by threats of personal violence. Others have been seized in the presence of their wives and daughters and dragged away to some secluded spot and there brutally beaten and otherwise maltreated.” They asserted, “these crimes were committed by the Ku Klux Klan or by others on account of the atmosphere created by the Klan.” The petition went on to declare that the Klan oath required obedience and loyalty to that organization above all others. Hence, Klan membership was inconsistent with sworn public service. The petition concluded, “we must determine whether we are to have a government of law or government by the mob, which means anarchy and ruin. There is no middle ground for a good citizen to take. We must demand of our officer’s undivided allegiance.”13

The pervasiveness of the Klan in public life caused many, like the members of the Dallas County Citizen’s League, to question whether their elected officials either supported or were members of the organization. At the same time, the Klan itself was gaining political power as it

---

began to endorse candidates for office. Candidates came under increasing pressure by Progressive citizen’s league members and conservative Klan members to take a side. One of the first things Dallas County Citizen’s League did was to distribute questionnaires to all public office holders and candidates thereof that included questions about Klan membership and loyalty. The responses to the questionnaires were published in local newspapers for the benefit of the voting public. Neff apparently never returned his. Despite this non-committal public persona, privately the governor maintained a dialogue with some of the Dallas County Citizens’ League leaders including Crane and Cullen Thomas, then a senate candidate who campaigned on the notion that the Klan should be reformed or destroyed. It appears that, much as he did in the previous election on the political unknown of woman suffrage, Neff avoided taking a position either way that could be politically damaging. The tactic was not particularly pretty, or brave, but it insured that no voter would discount him for having taken a definite position. In view of the fractured state of Texas politics at the time, it may well have been a winning strategy. Nevertheless, because of Neff’s evasive stance with reference to the Klan, people frequently quizzed the governor both publicly and privately on his personal views of the organization.14

The press continued to badger Neff on the question. In an editorial, the Dallas Morning News noted “There are a good many people who have come to suspect that, in addition to being Governor of Texas, Mr. Neff might be a subject in that ‘Invisible Empire’ which has its capital in Georgia.” The editorial further noted that when being directly questioned by one of its reporters, Neff had denied being a Klansman or of ever having been one. The editors then made the very good point that a mere denial was not good enough because it did not answer the question central in the minds of voters: Did the governor approve of the organization and its methods? So,

14“Questionnaire on Klan Being Drawn,” DMN, April 9, 1922; “Klan Must Reform or be Destroyed,” DMN, April 4, 1922; Neff had frequent correspondence with Crane during 1920 and 1921. Thomas was an old friend of the governor as well as a confidant and informal advisor.
despite the denials, questions persisted. People often wrote the governor and asked him directly. In a reply to one such letter, Neff stated categorically, “I am not a member of the Ku Klux Klan, never have been a member, never made application for membership, and it is not my intention at any time to become a member.” Neff then reiterated his public stand that he was for “law enforcement” through “organized channels.” Though Neff often strongly denied Klan membership in private letters, this of course did not help his public image.\textsuperscript{15}

Many voters were so opposed to the Klan that the mere hint of support from the organization was a mark against a candidate. To complicate matters, the Klan not only gave official endorsement of candidates presumably with their permission, it also sometimes simply identified candidates that were “Klan leaning” with or without permission. Through the years, and especially at the time, there was considerable debate over Neff’s possible membership in the Klan despite his continued denials. The source of much of this went back to a Klan meeting held in Dallas’s Fair Park in July of 1922. At this meeting, Klan members distributed flyers listing candidates either “In Favor with Klan” or “Not Klan Sympathizers.” The former listed Neff’s name. However, the organization never formally endorsed the governor and he never acknowledged whether or not he supported the Klan. This approval of Neff by the Klan, no matter how lackluster, probably gained Neff some votes in the primary, but it probably lost some others. The net effect of this was that, by not taking a strong stand either way, the governor avoided serious political damage. In the long-term, Neff’s refusal to take a strong public stand against the Klan tainted Neff’s historical standing and likely would have been an impediment to higher office.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15}“The Reticence of Governor Neff,” Editorial, \textit{DMN}, March 28, 1922; Neff to Ben Gross, undated, PNP.

\textsuperscript{16}“The Klan Issue is Presented in Rival Lists of Candidates,” \textit{DMN}, July 16, 1922.
Another of the serious challenges facing Governor Neff as he entered the 1922 political season was the Brotherhood of Railroad Shopmen’s Strike. The strike had far-reaching consequences, not just for Texas, but also for the entire nation. In a time when the country’s highway system was just beginning to be developed, and air travel was both rudimentary and unproven, the railroads were the only option for long-distance travelers and shippers of heavy freight. This strike also coincided with a strike of the United Mine Workers (UMW) coal miners. Together, these two strikes threatened to bring the American economy to its knees. The situation greatly concerned the administration of President Warren G. Harding who was willing to bring the full power of the United States government to bear in order to end the strikes. In Texas, the railroad strike was the more significant of the two. The state had relatively few coal mines and those were in decline as the nation moved toward oil as fuel source. In fact, the UMW pulled out of Texas as a result. Meanwhile, the states’ geographic location as well as its many miles of railroad track mileage, promised to make the Railroad Shopmen’s strike a major problem. Neff, being in the middle of a reelection campaign, found himself in an almost untenable political situation. He needed the votes of labor, yet was expected to help break a strike by a desperate federal government. The only question was how Neff would balance these two competing interests in order to maintain his own political interests.17

17Colin J. Davis, *Power at Odds: the 1922 National Railroad Shopmen’s Strike* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 11-3; Roberto Calderón, *Mexican Coal Mining Labor in Texas and Coahuila, 1880-1930* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 11, 13, 98, 160-1; According to Calderón, Texas coal mining had declined to the point there was little work. Much of the labor force had been replaced with Mexican or Mexican-American labor; racism would not have allowed them to be represented by the UMW. By the time of the strike, the UMWT had pulled out of the state. For more on the plight of Mexican-American labor in Texas see Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*, (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1993); Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) and Juan Gomez-Quinones, *Mexican American Labor, 1790-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1994); A common thread in all the above cited works is that race frequently prevented interracial cooperation. Managers also routinely used race as a wedge to maintain control of the labor force.
The strike itself had been brewing for years as a product of both the First World War and
the post-war economy. As part of the country’s mobilization for war, the federal government
placed the railway system under the direction of the United States Railroad Administration on
December 28, 1917. Prior to the war, inefficiency hobbled the industry. The railroads were
generally “under equipped and technically backward”; moreover, they suffered heavy financial
burden. This inefficiency compelled the federal government to take over the railroads to
facilitate the movement of war materiel. Furthermore, the government was worried that strikes
and other labor disruption on the railroads and other industries would hamper the war effort, so
wage increases were applied liberally. The immediate result of this was inflation and labor
conflict. During 1919 and 1920, the nation’s economy suffered massive inflation. When
compared to 1914, the cost of living had risen by 77 percent by 1919 and 105 percent by 1920.¹⁸

During the war, the Railroad Administration ran equipment to the breaking point and
placated labor, all in the name of prosecuting the war. By the end of the war, the railroads were
in terrible technical and financial shape while their employees, like many others, balanced
greatly increased wages with sharply higher prices. Partly because of this, the nation’s railroads
remained under government control even after the war. In order to deal with potential labor
problems, the Transportation Act of 1920, also known as the Esch-Cummins Act, established the
Railroad Labor Board. The Board was charged with settling nation-wide disputes through either
collective bargaining or arbitration. Although the board could fix wages, neither labor nor the
railroads were required to abide by these decisions. However, many hoped that public opinion

¹⁸George B. Soule, Prosperity Decade: From War to Depression, 1917-1929 (New York: Harper and Row,
1947), 33, 5; Burl Noggle, Into the Twenties: The United States from Armistice to Normalcy, (Urbana: University of
would force compliance. Ultimately, the ability of the Railroad Labor Board to force wage cuts that led to the Railroads Shopmen’s Strike of 1922.19

The membership of the Brotherhood of Railroad Shopmen comprised some 400,000 machinists, boilermakers, electricians, sheet-metal workers and railway carmen. These highly skilled men were responsible for the repair and maintenance of steam locomotives, as well as railcars, and without them, the railroads would grind to a halt. Their activities centered in a series of “shops,” or repair facilities, scattered throughout the country. In Texas, there were ninety-seven such shops employing some 15,850 men. The shop at Denison belonged to the financially troubled Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad (MK&T, popularly known as the “Katy”). Denison is located approximately sixty miles north of Dallas in Grayson County. The city billed itself as the “Gate City of Texas” because it was the first and last city in the state seen by northern travelers. The Katy line running through Denison was Texas’ main north-south rail link, and the shop there was crucial to keeping the line running. When the strike did come, it affected approximately 1,000 men in the Denison shop.20

For the Katy, the strike threatened the very existence of the company. Just two weeks before the strike, the Texas Railroad Commission valued the Katy at $62.2 million against a debt of $74.8 million. At the same time, the company had been in receivership since 1917 and was struggling to reorganize. The Katy was not alone, and the railroad industry as a whole began to petition the Railroad Labor Board for wage cuts in 1921. In May of that year, the board agreed to cut wages across the board. Meanwhile, talks broke down between the railroads and the shopmen over the issue. A month previously, Katy employees had rejected a proposal by the

---


railroad that would have effectively canceled the raise granted them the previous year. Haggling over the wage issue continued into 1922 with little progress.\textsuperscript{21}

As the hot Texas summer approached, the situation heated up as well. On May 28, the Railroad Labor Board, meeting in Chicago, voted to cut wages by three to five cents per hour effective July 1. The vote was a six to three split with the government and railroad representatives voting together against labor. In the dissenting vote, labor representatives stated that the action set wages “below the minimum standard of subsistence.” They continued, “The rates of pay established under this decision are not based upon the needs of the hundreds of thousands of families involved…They are insufficient to provide these families with the absolute essentials.” They concluded, “The earnings of this large group of railroad employees will not provide the father of a family with as much food as is allowed convicts in the Cook County [Illinois] Jail. The pre-war standard perpetuated by this decision is the product of inequitable wage bargains.” This remained the position of the union throughout the strike.\textsuperscript{22}

On May 30, the executive council of the Brotherhood of Railroad Shopmen, meeting in Detroit, authorized the mailing of ballots to the union membership to call a strike. If the members voted “yes,” the strike was set to begin in the first week of July. Union officials reported that their “treasure chest” was full and that funds were “plentiful” to tide over workers during the strike. Meanwhile, railroad officials fully expected the shopmen to go on strike. According to one source, “Executives frankly admit that they are anxious for the expected ‘show-down,’ and that over the period six weeks prior, “Thousands of freight and passenger cars have been rushed into shops for repairs not necessitated by conditions.” So, the battle lines were drawn.


\textsuperscript{22}“Wages of 400,000 Men Cut Three to Five Cents an Hour,” \textit{DMN}, May 29, 1922.
drawn. Railroad officials were spoiling for a fight while the union voted on whether to strike or accept the $60 million wage cut.\textsuperscript{23}

During the next few days, the union began to reinforce its position. As provisions were being made for the distribution and counting of the strike ballots, it also began to make overtures to a public that would likely be greatly inconvenienced by the strike. The union enumerated its complaints in a press release as follows:

1. Seven unsatisfactory rules recently promulgated by the Labor Board including five rules wiping-out time and a half pay.
2. “Farming-out” of shop work to outside firms; alleged illegal installation of piece work, and alleged arbitrary and unauthorized reduction of wages by several roads.
3. The $60 million pay-cut effective July 1.

The union also made a personal appeal to President Harding in a letter, who released it to the press. The letter protested “starvation wages” and asked the president if he thought the wages were “sufficient to maintain an American standard of living and properly sustain a family.” The union also accused the Railroad Labor Board and the federal government of favoring the railroads. Shopmen union head R. M. Jewell said, “The employees can not help noticing the contrast between their losses [wages] and the increasing profits of the railroads…The danger lies in the fact that the board is one branch of the government.”\textsuperscript{24}

As both the strike and the Democratic primary approached, Governor Neff’s uneasy relationship with labor became more apparent. Generally, Neff needed to appear friendly (or at least non-confrontational) with labor in order to placate the Progressive wing of the state Democratic Party. Yet, Neff could not afford to be too friendly in order to avoid offending conservative Democrats who were suspicious of organized labor. The crux of the problem was


\textsuperscript{24}“400,000 Shopmen Vote on Strike,” \textit{DMN}, May 31, 1922; “Rail Leaders Will Appeal to Harding,” June 9, 1922; “Rail Board Helps Roads, Shopmen’s Chief Charges, \textit{DMN}, June 7, 1922.
that in 1920 Neff had only narrowly won a run-off with conservative icon and former Senator Joseph Weldon Bailey while receiving considerable support from Texas Progressives. By 1922, the political climate had changed. Conservative forces such as the Ku Klux Klan were running rampant in the state. Also by this time, “normalcy” had begun to set in, and Texans did not appear to be in the mood for progressive-style politics. In these days prior to modern political polling, and given the apparent political realities, Neff simply could not be assured of winning the nomination if he alienated either Progressives or conservatives. So, as Neff often did, he walked the line between these competing forces. The governor never said enough to get him into trouble, but what he did say, often left people wanting. Neff’s noncommittal posture often made him seem to be indecisive when actually it was simply a political strategy designed to avoid upsetting competing factions.

One issue on which Neff often appeared to be indecisive was the controversy over “open” and “closed” shops, or workplaces. At this time, unions were still struggling for recognition, and this issue was at the core of the struggle. Unions supported closed shops in which the workplace was “closed” to all but union members. Of course, businessmen supported workplaces that were “open” to all who wanted to work. This was the root of Neff’s uneasy relationship with labor. Many progressives supported the closed shop whereas conservatives supported the open shop. During Neff’s 1920 election campaign, he was very careful not to say too much or too little on the issue. In one speech, just a few days before the run-off with Bailey, Neff spoke to a large crowd in Beaumont, which billed itself as the “town that made the open shop famous.” During most of the speech, Neff’s main topic was Bailey and his unsuitability for office. When Neff finally turned to the topic of labor, the crowd listened intently as he stated general support for labor—but not necessarily union labor. Neff’s lukewarm endorsement of labor may have been
enough to comfort some Progressives, but it only contributed to his declining support among organized workers.\(^{25}\)

In another speech a few days later in Mexia, Neff proceeded to bash Bailey through most of the speech. The key difference was that this time Neff had a list of seventeen questions to which he asked Bailey to respond. One of the questions specifically addressed the issue of the open shop. Neff began by stating that he supported “the present law, under which the open shop, union shop, and all similar organizations are permitted to organize.” Neff elaborated, “I believe that both capital and labor have the right to organize, each has the right to bargain collectively, each has the right to deal with the other through duly elected representatives” but, “a man has the right to quit his job, or the right to do the work his neighbor didn’t want to do. The employee should be left free to join the open or closed shop or stay out of both.” Once again, Neff’s tactic of taking neither side on a controversial topic resurfaced as he seemingly came out in favor of both the open and closed shop. The tactic may have worked with some voters, but it did not with labor voters then engaged in a monumental struggle for both recognition and a decent living. Neff’s refusal to come out squarely for the closed shop caused many of his problems with labor.\(^{26}\)

Two years later, as the Railroad Shopmen’s Strike threatened, labor remembered Neff’s lack of support. In June 1922, the *Southwestern Railway Journal*, a mouthpiece for the railway brotherhoods published in Fort Worth, reminded its membership of Neff’s earlier transgressions. During the 1920 campaign, the Railway Employee’s Legislative Board sent Neff a questionnaire on his attitudes toward labor, not once but twice, and received no response. The *Journal* further noted that the problem was not that Neff had not gotten the questionnaire as the board had

\(^{25}\)“Neff Cheered in Open Shop Town,” *DMN*, August 12, 1920.

\(^{26}\)“Neff is Greeted Gladly at Mexia,” *DMN*, August 15, 1920.
received acknowledgement from the Neff campaign that it had. The Journal went on to mention Neff’s veto of a minimum wage act and was especially hostile about Neff’s support and use of the Open Port Law that was supposed to maintain the flow of commerce but was actually used to limit labor. The Journal concluded that though it held “no malice toward the governor” it could not see how his record made him a “friend of labor.” It was this perception that led many in labor circles to support Neff’s opponent and fellow Progressive, Fred S. Rogers, for the Democratic nomination for governor in 1922. Rogers was rabidly pro-labor and probably considered too liberal by conservatives. Rogers received endorsements from several labor leaders.27

Another factor that soured Neff’s relationship with labor was his use of the Open Port Law to declare martial law, in various locations throughout the state, in order to put-down “lawlessness.” The law had been passed late in the administration of Neff’s predecessor, William P. Hobby, specifically to deal with a longshoreman’s strike in Galveston that began in March 1920. This law was aimed at protecting workers involved in the transport of goods from violence or other intimidation. Although ostensibly, as its name implied, the law was to insure that ports remained open and that commerce would flow, the law was actually aimed at breaking strikes. Hobby used the Open Port Law as a basis for declaring martial law in Galveston and sending both Texas Rangers and National Guard troops to secure the port. Hobby’s decision had several repercussions. First, it set the precedent of the governor using the law as a pretext to declare martial law. Second, it also set the precedent of using the force of the state to try to break labor. Finally, and most important to Neff’s relationship with labor, state forces still remained in Galveston at the time of his inauguration. To complicate matters further, Governor

Hobby had ordered the removal of the forces as one of his last actions as chief executive but left it to Neff to carry out the order. A few days later, when Neff became governor, he made an investigation into conditions at Galveston and decided “no changes” would be made in the “system of policing the city.” By reversing Hobby’s decision, and keeping Rangers in Galveston, Neff alienated labor from the outset.28

Neff’s opening speech in Plainview on June 24 addressed many topics, including prisons, public schools, law enforcement, the establishment of state parks, and conservation of the state’s water resources, among others. Neff devoted a portion of the speech to “The Cause of Labor” in which he began by defending his administration’s record. According to the governor, “The State Department of Labor is carefully looking after the interest of the laboring people.” He noted that his administration had representatives in one hundred eighty-three cities and had inspected 2,500 workplaces employing 112,704 employees. Neff then reiterated his views on organized labor, “That the cause of labor has the right to organize, and when organized, the right to deal collectively with their employer, there can be no question. Differences between labor and capital should be settled in peace around the council table.” Characteristically, Neff added, “Above the employer and the employees stands at all times, to be respected and obeyed, the law of the land.” Although this statement seems consistent with Neff’s 1920 position, there are some differences apparent to the careful observer. The first sentence supports the right of labor to organize for the purpose of collective bargaining. Neff also seemed to be stressing the need for conciliatory negotiation as well as respect for the law. In the final analysis, Neff seemed to be letting labor

---

know that while he respected its position, he expected it to respect his. This would be especially
true of the railroad shopmen who would be going on strike a week later.29

On June 27, the union prodded the railroad executives one last time by offering to avert
the strike if they began negotiations on the wage issue. As expected, the railroads rebuffed the
offer. Two days later, union leaders issued the order for a walkout at 10:00 A.M. on July 1.
Meanwhile, the Railroad Labor Board summoned both labor and railroad leaders to appear
before the board. Labor flouted the order, and the strike began as scheduled. The union also
reported that 96 percent of its membership had voted for the strike. When the strike did begin, it
quickly became apparent that the railroads intended to break the union and that the federal
government was supporting the endeavor. Almost immediately, railroad executives sent out calls
to employment offices all over the country for men to fill the positions of the strikers. The
Harding Administration endorsed the move and offered to use its “full power” to protect those
workers remaining on the job. Back in Texas, the Southwest Railroad Journal, a publication of
the railroad unions headquartered in Fort Worth, heaped criticism on both the Railroad Labor
Board and the administration. In an editorial, the journal referred to the Board as a “tool of the
railroads” and criticized it for continuing to “whittle” at wages. It went on to state that the
President and “vile set of humans” [railroad executives] who proposed to destroy the men who
they had treated as “galley slaves” should expect to see a “real contest.” As the month of June
dwindled and the July 1 strike date approached, it appeared that neither side was willing to
compromise.30

---

29“Governor Neff Makes Opening Speech,” DMN, June 25, 1922.
30“Hope for Peace is Virtually Gone,” DMN, June 28, 1922; “Roads Expected to Deny Union Demand,”
DMN, June 3, 1922; “400,000 Shopmen are Scheduled to Cease Operations,” DMN, July 1, 1922; “Ballot of
Shopmen Show 96 Percent in Favor of Strike,” DMN, July 1, 1922; “Government Backs Campaign to Recruit Men
to Take Places of Shop Strikers,” DMN, July 2, 1922; “It Will Not [Back] Down,” Southwestern Railway Journal,
June 1922, Vol. XVI, No. 6. 7.
On July 1, shopmen all across Texas walked off their jobs. In Houston, workers began leaving the shops shortly after 10:00 A.M. Many announced that it was a “one-hundred percent strike” as they walked away. Walkouts were reported all over the state; 300 in Dallas, 1,000 in Marshall, 1,400 in Fort Worth, and 1,100 in San Antonio. Newspapers reported that the Katy shops in Denison were “continuing operation with a small force.” All of the Katy shopmen had left their jobs. The strike began in Denison when the shop whistle blew over the Katy yard precisely at the scheduled time. The men left railroad property peacefully, carrying with them their own personal tools. Union officials instructed them to avoid disturbances or loitering on railroad property, and this they did. But one question remained—would the strikers remain peaceful? The *Southwestern Railway Journal* warned that they might not and laid the blame squarely on the railroads and the government if that happened. The editor noted, “The government, as well as the railroads, must know that the limits of this strike may reach to a dangerous point, if permitted to continue with respect for the striker’s rights, and if it does, who could avoid the danger point if they will.” Violence could be avoided if only the men in suits would make it so.31

Neff could have only hoped that the powers of his office would not be called upon too early, as he tiptoed through the political minefield in which he found himself. However, that was not to be. Although things were generally quiet for the first week, as the strike continued, incidents of violence occurred in rail shops all around the state. These incidents often prompted local officials to appeal for help in keeping order. On July 10, federal authorities sent several hundred United States deputy marshals to protect both trains and railroad property throughout

---

Texas. This included 150 men sent to guard the Katy shop in Denison. Yet, the governor remained silent on requests for action. He had good reason to be quiet. Controversy was then swirling over the Open Port Law under which Neff would likely act if state action were called for. At the annual meeting of the Texas Bar Association, the organization’s president, Richard Mays, criticized the use of the open port law as a “usurpation” of municipal authority. Mays specifically cited the case of Governor Hobby’s use of the law with the Longshoremen’s Strike in Galveston in 1919, as well as Neff’s, in the case of Mexia. Others openly suggested the use of the law to limit the shopmen’s strike. This included Thomas Finty, managing editor of the *Dallas Morning News*, who told the governor as much privately during a phone call and then publicly in an editorial. Neff struggled to balance political realities with events as it became increasingly clear that he would have to act.32

Finally, on July 12, an incident occurred in Denison that Neff could not ignore. On that morning, the Katy brought in forty-eight strikebreakers. Upon the men’s arrival, four federal marshals escorted them from Union Station to the Katy shop. An angry mob of several hundred intercepted the men before they could get to the shop. One man was shot and seriously injured, while sixteen were shoved into cars and taken to the Red River bottoms and flogged. Four men were found wandering along the railroad tracks across the river in Oklahoma later in the morning. In the end, the strikebreakers were quickly hustled out of Denison and calm returned to the town. At the time of the incident, Governor Neff was campaigning in Stephenville. In the meantime, J. L. Lancaster, receiver of the Texas and Pacific Railroad, asked the governor to provide state troops to protect its workers. When a reporter asked Neff about Lancaster’s request, he responded cryptically, “We’ll have to let those matters take care of themselves as

---

they come along.” The governor first learned of the Denison incident via an Associated Press dispatch read to him over the telephone. Neff interrupted the party on the other end with “There is no use reading all that to me. I’ll let you know when I decide what I shall do.” For the next two weeks, the question on everyone’s mind was, what, if anything, would the governor do?33

The next day, Denison was quiet, and the striking men continued their picketing. If anything, the previous day’s events caused the men to be more diligent about keeping out strikebreakers. A picketing force of fifty men guarded every entrance to railroad property and changed shifts every six hours. In addition, other men guarded adjoining parks and the highways leading into town through which the railroads could bring in strikebreakers. Meanwhile, pressure began to build on Governor Neff to take action. Charles C. Huff, an attorney for the Katy, announced that railroad officials had made a request of the governor to send state troops into Denison. Federal authorities reacted quickly to the call for help by sending more deputy marshals into the town. At the same time, and rather ominously, Secretary of War John W. Weeks instructed Major General John L. Hines, commanding the Eighth Army Corps stationed in San Antonio, to prepare to deploy a contingent of federal troops to Denison. Despite this, the governor remained unmoved. Neff’s response to the Katy’s request for state troops reveals much about his state of mind at the time. In a telegram to Huff, the governor stated, “I have been doing, and am still doing, preliminary investigating in order that…I might do what is right in this matter. I am exceedingly anxious that I do not do the wrong thing or the right thing at the wrong time or in the wrong way. I am keeping in close touch with the situation.” This statement is

---

33“Riot at Denison,” AS, July 12, 1922.
very revealing especially if one interprets “the right thing at the wrong time” as sending in the National Guard to break the strike anytime prior to the Democratic Primary.34

With a little less than two weeks until the primary, Neff began his investigation of the situation at Denison. Authorities in Denison had already issued assurances that they did not want or need state troops. Mayor W. F. Weaver stated that, “There is no basis for any reports that there is any disorder or fighting in Denison on account of the strike. We respectfully request that no troops be sent to Denison.” The mayor further noted that Denison was a “railroad town,” that local merchants were already hurting because of the strike, and that a declaration of martial law was likely to erode business further. Grayson County Sheriff Boyd Craig met with a committee of strikers and told them that though he had been requested to ask for troops in Denison, he did not think that “conditions warranted it at this time.” However, Sheriff Craig also warned that he would not stand for “lawlessness.” Despite these assurances, and under pressure from the Harding administration, Governor Neff sent Adjutant General Thomas D. Barton and Texas Ranger Captain Thomas Hickman to investigate the situation in the town. The two arrived on July 14. After taking a day or two to review conditions there, General Barton expressed surprise at the “calmness of the situation” and noted “little indication that conditions were not under control of local officers.” This is the report that Neff ultimately received. But, Barton and Hickman were not the only men investigating the situation in Denison.35


35“Denison Strikers Picket Yards and Shops After Clash,” DMN, July 13, 1922; “Governor Orders Adjutant General to Denison; U.S. Troops Ready to Move if Required,” AS, July 14, 1922; “Denison Calm Under Probe of Officials,” HC, July 16, 1922; Davis, Power at Odds, 94; According to Davis, Secretary of War Weeks attacked Neff’s “inaction” and warned that the federal government would not wait long before taking action on its own. Meanwhile, Neff was getting contradictory reports from federal and local officials and sent Barton and Hickman to investigate.
Rumors emanated from Washington that the Harding administration was not satisfied with the governor’s actions and was considering sending federal troops to Denison. Therefore, Colonel Charles S. Lincoln, who was General Hines’s chief of staff, arrived in Denison from San Antonio on July 15. Two days later, Lincoln’s report was given to President Harding. Lincoln concluded that though the situation was generally peaceful, no trains were moving and that the Denison shop was effectively shut down, which meant that it would be unable to repair engines or keep the line open. Meanwhile, Governor Neff continued to mull over his course of action. Neff sought and received the advice of several people in addition to Tom Finty. In a letter to Neff’s secretary, R. B. Walthall, attorney R. U. Grisham of Eastland counseled caution with reference to the strike. Grisham advised that labor would “support him [Neff] if force is not required at his hands of a drastic nature.” Another friend of Neff’s, Benjamin G. Gross, in a letter dated July 14 noted that many were saying that Neff should have already intervened in the strike. Gross wrote, “This is something I cannot advise you on, but I’m afraid it may lose you votes for no other purpose than your enemies saying you are trying to dodge the issue.” Neff continued to bide his time.36

The governor’s time ran out at 4:00 P.M. on July 16, when Colonel Lincoln unexpectedly appeared in Neff’s office. By this time, the governor had almost decided to send the Texas Rangers into Denison, but had made no firm plans. According to Neff, Lincoln introduced himself, and after the two exchanged greetings, announced that he had been “commissioned by the federal government to call at your office and remain here until I get an answer, ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer as to your intentions in regard to the placing of the state militia at Denison for the protection of life, property, and commerce.” At this point, Neff reached a politically decisive

36“Denison Calm Under Probe of Officials,” HC, July 16, 1922; “Denison Probe Results Given to President,” HC, July 17, 1922. R. U. Grisham to R. B. Walthall, July 15, 1922, PNP; Benjamin Gross to Neff, July 14, 1922, PNP.
moment. With any action he took, the governor could appear indecisive, obstructionist, or uncooperative, or he could appear to be a pawn of the administration. Any mistake, any escalation of violence, could lose the election just six days away. Upon hearing Lincoln’s statement, Neff coolly replied that he had already begun to arrange to use the Rangers at Denison. To this Lincoln replied, “I have not been delegated to discuss the merits of the case with you, but to get a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. If your answer is ‘yes’ the federal government will leave it to the state to handle; if the answer is ‘no’ a thousand federal soldiers out of San Antonio will be on their way to Denison in about thirty minutes.” Lincoln added that Neff was free to take the time he needed to make the decision, but he had been instructed to remain in the governor’s office until an answer was received.37

The situation Neff faced was similar to that faced by Governor John P. Altgeld of Illinois during the Pullman Strike of 1894. In that case, the strike brought rail traffic to a standstill in the Midwest; the governor was under pressure from President Grover Cleveland to use the state militia to break the strike. Altgeld resisted, sending troops only at the request of local officials. Ultimately, Cleveland sent federal troops; Neff knew Harding could do the same in this case. For three hours, Governor Neff made calls to various official and advisors all around the state. Lincoln remained in the governor’s office the entire time. At this point, Lincoln left the office, and Neff did not immediately declare martial law in Denison. Exactly what happened in Neff’s office is not known, but the events speak for themselves. It seems highly unlikely that a an Army colonel, when ordered to get a specific answer to a specific question, presumably by no less than the President of the United States, would have returned without some kind of answer.

37Neff, The Battles of Peace, 74-5.
Neff must have given Lincoln, and therefore the President, some kind of conditional answer. That condition would eventually become clear.  

In making his decision, Neff would have taken several political realities into account in addition to the election. As governor of Texas, a southern state, Neff had to be mindful of “state’s rights,” an issue that was then important to many Texas voters. Any perceived usurpation of the state’s sovereignty by the federal government would be politically damaging to Neff. Furthermore, the governor also had to be mindful of President Harding’s power as commander-in-chief. The president would have been within his legal rights to federalize the Texas National Guard and take command of it away from the governor. From a political standpoint, Neff was looking at a double-edged sword that could cut him both ways. If Neff allowed federal troops to be placed in Denison, in the eyes of many, he would have been allowing the usurpation of Texas’s right to maintain order within its own borders. On the other hand, if Neff allowed the federalization of National Guard troops, he would have effectively allowed the usurpation of his own power as commander-in-chief of the state militia. The governor was clearly thinking along these lines. According to Neff, “I was unwilling for federal troops to march on Texas soil for the purpose of enforcing Texas laws. I felt that Texas men, and if need be, Texas bullets and Texas blood, should protect Texas life and property, and keep open the channels of Texas commerce. I took my stand for the supremacy and for the sovereignty of the state.” If anything, it is obvious that, at the time, Neff was thinking about Texas and his role as its chief executive—and his re-election.  

---


39 Ibid.
Thus, with Lincoln and the prospect of immediate federal interference safely removed from his office, Neff began to plan his course of action. On July 19, Governor Neff suspended his reelection campaign in order to concentrate on dealing with the strike. As he had done earlier when “lawlessness” had presented itself in the oil boomtown of Mexia, Neff made a personal inspection of Denison. The governor apparently took pains to make sure he was getting the real story. Neff reported that he had disguised himself and “made the rounds at night, and talked with those on picket duty.” The governor met with union leaders, city officials, businessmen, and ordinary people. Though the situation had been peaceful since the railroad had last tried to bring in strikebreakers, local peace officers told Neff that they would not be able to maintain order if the Katy repeated its attempt to bring in outside workers. This was probably crucial as Neff made his next decision. All indications were that the governor was going to do something, but he remained quiet as to exactly what that would be. Yet, Governor Neff had not even sent the Rangers to Denison, even though Mayor Weaver had finally requested this action. Before Neff left Denison, he conferred with General Barton and Captain Hickman, presumably about the action to come. Neff also reiterated his desire to maintain the sovereignty of the state and keep commerce open. He made no mention of his plans. Neff returned to Austin to make final arrangements and then went home to Waco to await the judgment of the voters.40

In the meantime, there were continued calls for Neff to take action that only elicited coy responses from the governor. In an editorial, the Dallas Morning News chided the governor for his apparent dithering. According to the editors, “One would perhaps be unduly optimistic to see in this announcement of Governor Neff’s purpose to go to Denison indubitable evidence that he

---

40 “Governor Neff Cancels Political Dates,” DMN, July 20, 1922; “Neff Speeding to Denison; Promises to Maintain Law,” AS, July 20, 1922; “Action by Neff in Rail Strike is in Prospect,” HC, July 20, 1922; “Governor Silent on Request for State Officers,” AS, July 19, 1922; “Neff Confers with Officers at Denison but Makes No Announcement of his Plans,” DMN, July 21, 1922.
has at last found out what he ought to do. At last he has discovered, if not his duty, a clue thereto.” Despite the jibes, Neff maintained his uncommunicative demeanor. In a Waco press conference, the typically aloof chief executive was “unusually guarded.” When asked about the situation in Denison, and specifically about the possible use of the Open Port Law, Neff replied that he was not sure the law applied. Upon further questioning, Neff refused to say what action, if any, he would take in Denison. Then in a move surely designed to befuddle everyone, the governor remarked that the presence of Barton and Hickman in Denison did not indicate that he would use either the National Guard or the Rangers in the town. Finally, Neff divulged that he would determine his course of action in “a few days.” This was the press’s last opportunity to talk to the Governor of Texas before the Democratic Primary the next day.41

And so the votes were counted, and at Camp Mabry, home of the Texas National Guard in Austin, troops prepared for deployment. Early election returns on the gubernatorial race appeared somewhat inconclusive. In one press release by the Texas Election Bureau, Neff was only “assured a place” in the run-off, probably against labor-backed Fred Rogers. Another release gave Neff a solid majority of votes with the note that if present trends continued, the governor would avoid a run-off. Despite the initial uncertainty, everything soon became clear. Newspapers across Texas proclaimed Neff’s victory. More tellingly, newspaper reports indicated that the state was moving on Denison. On July 24, Neff ordered Texas Rangers into the town. The following day, fearing that the force would be inadequate, he ordered five hundred National Guard troops into the town as well. In addition, the governor recruited more Ranger forces. Finally, on July 26, Neff declared martial law in Denison. He had not been

---

41“Governor Neff Begins to Move,” Editorial, DMN, July 21, 1922; Neff Postpones Strike Decision; Act Next Week,” AS, July 22, 1922.
dithering or indecisive at all; he had been waiting to act until a time that was politically expedient.\textsuperscript{42}

Once martial law came to Denison, the town remained quiet and there were no more serious incidents of violence. The strikers maintained their picket lines. National Guardsmen, Rangers, and local police patrolled the city’s streets. The troops remained in Denison until the end of the year. During the railroad strike, Neff placed sixteen Texas cities, including Denison, under martial law based on the Open Port Law. Only in the case of Denison was the governor under federal pressure to do so. Other governors also came under pressure to use state troops to break the strike. Because of the application of military force to protect railroad property and workers, the railroads were able to bring in replacement workers. Thus, the strike was broken. Most of the men who did return to work lost their seniority and took the pay cut. As for Governor Neff, he showed himself to be an adept politician. He had dealt effectively with a major crisis in the midst of his own successful reelection campaign. Neff had also managed to stall the Harding administration just long enough to meet his own political needs.\textsuperscript{43}

With Neff’s reelection in the fall virtually assured, the governor needed only to stay out of trouble until the November election. This proved to be a difficult task. The race to replace United States Senator Charles A. Culberson was the source of considerable controversy and constituted a battle royal between Texas’s conservatives and Progressives. At the root of this conflict was the Ku Klux Klan’s foray into organized politics. The Democratic Primary had pitted Klansman Earle B. Mayfield against former Governor Ferguson, who had been impeached.

\textsuperscript{42}``Activity at Camp Mabry is Taken to Mean Troop Order,’’ \textit{DMN}, July 23, 1922; ``Neff is Assured Place in Run-off,’’ \textit{DMN}, July 23, 1922; ``Returns in 117 Counties Give Neff Majority of 18,000,’’ \textit{HC}, July 23, 1922; ``Texas Rangers Are Ordered to Denison,’’ \textit{DMN}, July 24, 1922; ``National Guard Troops are Expected to Reach Denison Late Today,’’ \textit{DMN}, July 25, 1922; ``Ranger Forces Being Recruited for Strike Duty,’’ \textit{AS}, July 24, 1922; ``Denison is Quiet Under Martial Law,’’ \textit{HC}, July 27, 1922.

\textsuperscript{43}``Neff Lifts Open Port in All Cities,’’ \textit{DMN}, December 30, 1922; Brown, 86.
and removed from office in 1917. Though Mayfield had reportedly quit the Klan, he was, nevertheless, its endorsed candidate. The election threatened to split the state’s Democrats. Many feared that the Klan would successfully co-opt control of the Democratic Party. In a letter to Governor Neff, Houston physician E. W. Reeves wrote, “You doubtless realize that the time is fast approaching…when no man will be permitted to hold a public office…unless he is squarely a PROTESTANT GENTILE AMERICAN otherwise known as a KLANSMAN.” Another letter from Beaumont attorney Stuart Smith revealed much about the divisive political climate. Smith wrote, “There is a very angry and irritated condition here now due to Klan agitation…the candidate involved is thrown into the Klan melee, and if he happens to be proposed by an anti-Ku Klux Klan man the Ku Klux are against him and vice versa.” The Senate campaign exacerbated this situation and Neff’s chief worry in the fall of 1922 was getting caught in the mess.44

The ensuing contest marked one of the messiest episodes in Texas political history—and Neff was smart enough not to get involved. As the Texas Democratic Party Convention approached, Neff announced that he had “no platform plans.” Furthermore, Neff was “…not expected to take any part in writing the document.” When the convention convened in San Antonio on September 3, one of the proposed agendas included an “anti-Klan” plank. The fight over the plank constituted an all-out war between Progressive and conservative Texas Democrats. Through the next few days, the Resolutions Committee debated the anti-Klan plank and eventually drafted a weak version. When the issue went to the floor of the convention, debate was closed by a vote of 691 to 135. Thus, the convention rejected the anti-Klan plank. The action caused uproar on the floor of the convention and probably strengthened the resolve of

44Brown, Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug, 103; Brown includes an entire chapter entitled “Farmer Jim v. Prince Earle” on this topic.; Dr. E. W. Reeves to Neff, September 9, 1922, PNP; Stuart R. Smith to Neff, July 17, 1922, PNP.
Progressives. Neff’s decision to minimize his own participation at his party’s convention probably helped him maintain his favorable public image.45

In addition to their rejection of the Klan, Progressive Democrats also refused to accept its candidate for the Senate. Just days after the close of the party convention, Progressives began to search for an independent candidate to face Mayfield in the election. They chose Harris County Assistant District Attorney, George E. B. Peddy. In a surprise move, Texas Republicans removed their own candidate for Senate and replaced him with Peddy. This fusion candidacy was controversial. Part of this controversy centered on the “primary pledge” in which those who voted in the primary had to pledge to vote for the party’s candidate in the fall election. Some said that voters should adhere to their pledges, others said voters should not be obligated to vote for someone they did not support. In the midst of this controversy, one question remained on the minds of Texas voters: What did Governor Neff think?46

The governor was often pressed on the issue by reporters and others but steadfastly refused to say too much. Of course, the press was particularly interested in getting an answer. In mid-September, P. E. Fox, managing editor of the Dallas Times Herald, sent Neff the following telegram: “Please wire at our expense which candidate you will vote for or support in the senatorial election; Mayfield or Peddy.” Fox received a reply, not from the governor, but from his secretary, R. B. Walthall, who acknowledged receipt of the telegram and promised to “call his [Neff’s] attention to your message.” Walthall could have quite easily, and conveniently, “forgotten” to pass along the message. In any case, Neff was careful to avoid mention of the


46“Party Opponents of Klan Called,” DMN, September 10, 1922; “George E. B. Peddy Senate Candidate for Independents,” DMN, September 17, 1922; “Are They Trying to Run Texas Republican Party?” Letter to Editor, DMN, September 17, 1922; “Says Primary Obligation Nullified in Law and Equity,” Letter to Editor, DMN, September 17, 1922.
Senate race to the press. In fact, Neff never endorsed either candidate. Just before the November election, a Democratic Party rally was scheduled in Dallas at Fair Park which Mayfield was to attend. Lewis T. Carpenter, a candidate for the Texas legislature, asked Neff to attend and speak at the event. Carpenter made a personal appeal to the governor and characterized his visit as “a purely personal matter.” Ultimately, Neff decided not to attend the rally citing, “pressing official business.” It seems likely that Neff wanted to avoid close proximity to Mayfield.47

The contest between Mayfield and Peddy was hard and bitter. Both sides challenged the legitimacy of the other’s candidacy. Both filed suit to have the other’s name removed from the ballot, and Mayfield’s case went to the Texas Supreme Court. Just four days before the election, the court ordered the Secretary of State to postpone the printing of ballots. By election day, the issue remained unsettled, and it was not clear whose name would be on the ballot. Voters were upset and confused. Eventually, election officials certified Mayfield as the winner. Despite this, the legality of Mayfield’s candidacy remained in the courts for the next year. Furthermore, it was not immediately clear whether Senate leaders would even allow Mayfield to take his seat. Throughout this, Neff remained quiet. For the remainder of Neff’s tenure, he maintained a cordial yet limited relationship with Texas’ newest United States Senator.48

The events of 1922 tell us much about Neff and his brand of Progressivism. As a politician, Neff was inclined to avoid taking a side in controversial issues especially if it was politically damaging. This was the case with both the woman suffrage fight in 1920 as well as

47P.E. Fox to Neff, September 19, 1922, PNP; Walthall to Fox, PNP; “Neff Not to Attend; Mayfield off to Dallas,” DMN, October 28, 1922.

48“Mayfield’s Name Ordered on Ballot After Ruling by Supreme Court,” DMN, November 7, 1922; “Official Told to Hold-Up Printing,” DMN, November 4, 1922; “Voters In Today’s Elections and Dissatisfied with both Big Parties,” DMN, November 7, 1922.
the Railroad Shopmen’s Strike in 1922. Considering the fractious and noxious state of Texas politics at the time, it was a safe course if not very flattering. To Neff’s credit, his ability to stall President Harding for several days was impressive considering the stress the latter was under to end the strike. As a National Progressive, Neff’s standing was marred by his failure to support labor, the failure to offer a timely denunciation of the Ku Klux Klan, and the lack of a more forceful response to lynching. Neff’s actions at Mexia, though heavy-handed, are indicative of the lengths to which a Progressive may go in the name of preserving “order.” Interestingly, the events of 1922 actually reinforce Neff’s status as a Southern Progressive. When labor and capital came into conflict during the Railroad Shopmen’s Strike, Neff erred on the side of business and presumably economic development. Neff’s gingerly approach to the Ku Klux Klan and its race baiting and hate mongering is typical of a Southern politician unwilling to deal with racism and Jim Crow. Thus, Neff placed greater emphasis on economic issues while deemphasizing labor and race relations—typical of a Southern Progressive.

When 1922 ended, Neff had survived one of the most trying years in history for any Texas governor. Neff’s ability to weather this political storm, while mostly holding the lid on a chaotic and violent state, is commendable. Neff’s handling of the crisis at Mexia and Denison also revealed considerable political skill. By staying out of the fight between Mayfield and Peddy, Neff showed a keen understanding of the dangers of divisive partisan politics. To his credit, Neff never engaged in race baiting at a time when many politicians did. Above all else, in a year that would have broken a lesser politician, Neff’s performance drew national attention that put him under consideration as a possible presidential contender. At the end of a year that Neff must have been glad to have behind him, he began to prepare an agenda for the coming
legislative session. The politically seasoned and experienced governor no doubt looked forward to the possibility of a renewed effort toward Progressive reform.
CHAPTER 9
TOWARD A MORE PROGRESSIVE AGENDA—1923

In the achievement of the vital things of civilization, let the thinking men and women of this state who do things, realize that they must fight with eternal vigilance the battles of peace. In this modern struggle for law and order, for industrial freedom, for civic improvement, for the righteousness that exalteth a nation. We are going to win.

--Pat M. Neff

During 1923, Governor Pat Neff pursued a more Progressive legislative agenda hoping to utilize experience gained during his first term as well as a more stable political and social environment. He continued his emphasis on law and order through tougher laws and better enforcement, and emphasized fiscal matters, especially deficits and taxation. His Progressive ideals of preserving social order and maintaining responsible and efficient government became readily apparent. Though Neff continued to have problems in his relationship with the state legislature, he was able to claim two important achievements. First, he led in the establishment of a state park system, a success for which he became well known. Second, and more important, the governor was able to secure a complete geographical and hydrological survey of the state. This survey formed the basis of much of Texas’s future water reclamation and flood control efforts. In the governor’s second term, labor unrest and mob violence continued but seemed reduced. The Ku Klux Klan began to operate less as a vigilante movement and more as a political organization as it attempted to move into the mainstream. Neff maintained contacts with prominent Progressives and women. After the legislative session, the governor was able to look forward and enjoy the trappings of his office and made several important out-of-state trips. His participation in the National Governor’s Conference, as well as the annual meeting at the
Chautauqua Institute in New York State, drew national attention as the country prepared for presidential elections in 1924.

As the 38th Texas legislature began, incoming Speaker of the House, Richard E. Seagler of Palestine, announced that the session would closely follow a program guided by the 1922 platform of the Texas Democratic Party. These included such Progressive reforms as passage of the Sheppard-Towner Child Welfare Act, conservation of natural resources, tax equalization, regulation of public utilities, and calling a constitutional convention. Seagler also addressed the state’s fiscal problems, noting that it was “the duty of the legislature to solve the problem of the state’s financial deficiency and to do justice to everybody in regard to taxation.” When Governor Neff issued his first message to the legislature, he echoed some of Seagler’s sentiments. In particular, Neff strongly endorsed the calling of a constitutional convention, noting that “the progress of the state is hobbled and hamstrung.” Neff saw changing the constitution as a means of altering the state’s tax structure to solve its fiscal problems. Neff also called for improved funding of education. The governor also suggested improving the highway system, promoting water conservation, and bringing industry to the state. So, as the session began, political leaders hinted at Progressive reform—the only question was how successful it would be.¹

The governor issued his first message to the legislature, in person, in a joint session of the 38th Texas Legislature on January 13, 1923. In the speech, Neff struck a tone that was both conciliatory and Progressive calling for more efficient government and equitable taxation. He began, “I come not in the spirit of one who would dictate but in that finer and higher spirit of friendship. We are here to work out a great program to make Texas a better place in which to

“live.” Neff also promised not to force any bills through the legislature and to be generally cooperative. A main theme of Neff’s speech was the need for improvement and proper funding for education. Neff also touched on the issue of taxation, not just for the purposes of funding education, but in terms of the state’s growing deficits. The governor’s first instinct was that state government was inefficient and advocated consolidation and elimination of wasteful agencies. However, Neff also recognized that part of the problem was an antiquated tax system that was overly reliant on property taxes and too high in many cases. The governor also argued for greater taxation of corporations. Overall, Neff’s program was much clearer than in the previous legislature. Nevertheless, maintaining Progressive support and overcoming conservative opposition would require delicate balance. Neff’s ability to achieve that balance would decide the degree of success of his legislative program.²

Neff’s views on education and taxation, in fact, offer the best examples of his Progressive philosophy. The governor was a strong supporter of education at all levels both public and private. He served on the Baylor University Board of Trustees in some capacity most of his life. In his political memoir, published shortly after he left office, Neff noted, “Money spent for education is the best expenditure the state can make. Education is an investment that builds up the state. Ignorance is a burden that destroys it.” He added, “The cost of education is a proper and legitimate charge against the public treasury. It cost the state more to leave a child in ignorance than it costs to educate it.” In this passage, Neff made no distinction between public schools and universities, but the primary issue was funding public schools. At the time, there

²“The Governor’s Message,” AS, January 14, 1923; During this time period, the Texas Constitution required that the legislature meet for sixty days beginning in January. This was the regular session. If the appropriation bills were not completed within the regular session, the governor called a special session to pass the appropriation. By the 1920s, the legislature simply had too much to finish in ninety days. Thus, Neff had to call several special sessions. The governor could also call special sessions to deal with any legislation deemed important enough to warrant legislative action. Neff often included other proposed legislation for consideration in addition to appropriations during such sessions.
was considerable financial inequity among Texas school districts. On this point Neff stated, “This responsibility cannot be left solely to local communities. Some localities are poor in educational environment…to each of these, the strong and far reaching arm of the state should lend a helping hand.” Clearly, Neff believed that public education required active government involvement. The belief in the need for an activist state government in public education, which most considered a local responsibility, accentuates Neff’s Progressive ideals.³

Governor Neff’s views on taxation were really quite interesting, especially when being attributed to a business Progressive. During his tenure, state officials were engaged in a constant battle to balance increasing demands for public services and infrastructure against decreasing revenue from an antiquated tax system. At the time, state and local government were reliant on property taxes for revenue, and these sources were virtually exhausted. On the subject of taxation, Neff wrote that, “taxes taken from the people are supposed to go back in services.” Furthermore, Neff declared that taxes are paid based on either “property” or “privilege.” Correspondingly, Neff noted the difference between “tangible” assets, like real estate and “intangible” assets like income or stocks. Generally, Neff equated intangible assets with privilege, arguing that wealth and privilege enable people to amass intangible assets. Neff believed that Texas often overtaxed property and under taxed privilege, thus under taxing the rich at the expense of relatively poor property owners. According to Neff, "In our system, we are taxing land most heavily because it is tangible, though those who own it are often least able to pay; whereas in dealing with privilege which is more profitable than land, we tax less because of its intangible quality."⁴

³Pat M. Neff, The Battles of Peace, 29.
⁴Ibid., 79.
Neff believed the state’s tax structure should be changed to reflect this reality. Neff wrote, “Our statutes should be broadened. This done we shall find that the field of taxation is rich in untaxed taxables.” This statement alone is mind-boggling in terms of Neff’s being a business Progressive. But, Neff’s opinion as to the solution to this tax problem was most indicative of his Progressive philosophy. Neff wrote, “If I were privileged to write the tax laws of Texas, there should be no ad valorem tax for state purposes. I would release all property tax to the counties for purposes of local taxation. It would be far better for both the counties and the state, if real estate and personal property were assessed and taxed only for local purposes.” He continued, “while for state purposes taxes should be levied on public utilities, franchises, inherited property, incomes, banks, insurance companies, and enterprises of like character earning large profits from privileges conferred by the state.” This statement indicates a strong inclination toward a Progressive solution to the state’s fiscal problems and is definitely not pro-business. Neff was keenly aware of the need for fiscal reform. Although he was not beyond using the line-item veto to slash government expenditures, Neff must have realized that it was not enough and that the state would need to seek new revenues to provide services. This was a key issue for the governor and legislature during the 1923 session.5

On January 17, just one week after the convening of the legislative session, Governor Neff spoke at a “Mass Meeting for Law Enforcement” held in Fort Worth. Generally, these kinds of meetings were Progressive responses to Klan rallies and marches, held under the auspices of groups such as Martin Crane’s Dallas County Citizen’s League. In this case, the meeting centered on the need for law enforcement versus “lawlessness” and “mob violence” perpetrated by the Klan and other vigilantes. Neff began, “In keeping with the spirit of this

5Ibid., 81-3.
splendid gathering, I come as a citizen of Texas and as the Governor of this state to speak on the supremacy of the law.” Neff broke the problem down to its simplest form by noting, “The law is the…only guarantee we have for life, liberty, and property.” He added, “The first duty of government is to uphold the law. When a government ceases to enforce its laws, it ceases to be a government and becomes a mob.” Thus, the governor also called for the strict punishment of criminals and the supremacy of the state, not the mob, in the enforcement of the law. Neff appealed to the virtuous nature of the Progressive-minded crowd and alluded to their enemies, as he noted, “It is indeed a challenging day to the forces of righteousness to know that the forces of evil are making claim to respectability in this state.” With that, Neff offered a rather succinct assessment of the situation.  

The governor spoke on a variety of topics that day, all related to the state of law enforcement in Texas. One of the most enlightening of Neff’s comments concerned the horrific problem of lynching. According to Neff, “Another form of lawlessness that is causing an ever increasing disrespect for the courts is mob violence. Lynching is one of the darkest blots on the escutcheon of our civilization … Every lynching party strikes a deathblow to civilization.” The governor continued, “Lynching is a disease. We should have some legislation that would cure it …If the officers who permitted these lynching were made to lose their offices, and in addition to that, the state should hang about a dozen high-grade lynchers, Texas would no longer lead the world in [lynching].” This was one of the strongest statements made by Neff on this topic, and it showed his growing disgust and frustration. Neff concluded, “By the united effort of all right thinking people, we can whip the enemies of good government and make Texas the safest and best place in all the world to live.” Overall, it was a Progressive-sounding speech made to a

---

6“The Supremacy of the Law: Address Delivered by Pat M. Neff at the Mass Meeting for Law Enforcement at Fort Worth, Texas, Tuesday Night, January 17, 1923,” PNP.
Progressive-minded crowd. Herein lay the problem; those who needed to hear the speech either were not there or did not care to hear the message. Neff was right; ending lynching would indeed take a concerted effort by a large portion of the population—not just Progressives. As long as mobs of thugs held any public regard even that which was negative and based on fear, mob violence and lynching would likely continue beyond the reach of authorities.7

By 1923, Texas Progressives had made considerable progress in fomenting change. One important change was the increasing political power of women. Texas women voted for the first time in a presidential election in 1920, the same election that put Neff in the governor’s mansion. No doubt, most Texas women were glad for the change, and many were unapologetic about the exercise of their newly acquired power. Lily Joseph, President of the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs (TFWC), was one of the latter. Joseph remarked, “When I say that the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs is in politics, I make no apology. For years, we have sought to affect legislation in this state….We are in politics as patriotic women, as thinking citizens. We are vitally concerned in the government of Texas and the nation.” As the 38th Legislature of Texas convened, a feminine voice was heard on the floor of the House of Representatives. That voice belonged to Representative Edith Wilmans of Dallas. The editors of the Austin Statesman cited Wilmans’ election as evidence that times had changed and that the “great body of voters” desired “a Progressive program of legislation” to “keep pace with a new era.” The Statesman also cited the calls for a new constitution “to broaden the basic law of the state,” a measure supported by Neff, as evidence of the new era. The editors rightly conceded that law

---

7Ibid; See also Buenger, Path to a Modern South; Gruesome lynchings had a long history in Texas. Buenger gives a detailed account of the lynching of Henry Smith in Paris, Texas, in 1893 in Chapter One entitled, “The Fluid and the Constant: Persistent Factionalism, Lynching, and Reform, 1887-1896.” Chapter Seven, entitled “Women, the Ku Klux Klan, and Factional Identity, 1920-1927,” elaborates on the instances of lawlessness and violence in the 1920s—when Neff was governor.
enforcement, education, fiscal responsibility, and soil and water conservation would all require
the legislature to act “deliberately.” 8

Neff’s proposal for the conservation of water resources constituted an early success for
the governor. Up to this time, efforts to build reservoirs and create flood control were somewhat
disjointed, often being left up to local governments. Neff’s plan to centralize these efforts
enjoyed wide support and brought direction to an important issue. In semi-arid Texas, water was
always an important and contested issue. In 1923, the state faced an interesting position in
regards to water—East Texas often had too much and was subject to flooding, while West Texas
often had too little and was subject to drought. The goal was to tame floods in the east and ease
drought in the west, while using hydroelectric power for economic development. According to
Neff, “The work of water conservation and of land preservation has just begun. Its ultimate
value, no one can forecast.” When Neff signed the bill into law on January 31, it provided
$600,000 for a “topographic and hydrographic survey…as a basis for reclaiming overflowed
lands and conserving storm waters for utility purposes.” In addition, federal interest in the
project yielded an additional $600,000 and the valuable support of the federal Geological
Survey. The $1.2 million project began almost immediately as teams of surveyors crisscrossed
the state by land and air. By identifying sites for future dams, lakes, and reservoirs, the project
may have provided Neff’s most important and lasting legacy. 9

Another of Neff’s Progressive successes was the establishment of a state park system.
Neff first suggested the need for state parks near the end of the 38th Legislature. In making the
suggestion, he argued that, “nothing is more conducive to the happiness and contentment of a

8“Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs is ‘In Politics’,” DMN, January 14, 1923; “The ‘New’ Legislature,”
AS, January 10, 1923.

9Neff, The Battles of Peace, 51-4; “Reclamation Bill Signed By Neff,” DMN, February 1, 1923.
people, the state’s most valuable asset, than for them to go back to nature where the bees hum, the birds sing, the brooks ripple, the breezes blow, the flowers bloom, and the bass bite.” Because of Texas’ fiscal problems at the time, Neff took the novel approach of proposing a six-member board, serving without compensation, to solicit donations of tracts of land for parks. When the necessary legislation passed, Neff himself took the lead by donating a tract of his family’s land near Waco. As one of his last official duties, Governor Neff presided over the opening of Mother Neff State Park on December 12, 1924.10

Legislators continued to struggle with the need to fund government services, and again they faced budget shortfalls. Neff, even though committed to fiscal responsibility, did not merely favor cutting expenditures to meet available revenues. On April 16, he submitted to the legislature an eight-point plan to raise revenue—and taxes. These were: a corporate income tax on oil producers, refiners, and pipeline operators; a franchise tax on out-of-state companies operating in Texas; an increase in the gross receipts tax; inheritance tax; better collection of property taxes; collection of other delinquent taxes; statewide equalization of property taxes; and finally, an income tax. In reference to the income tax, Neff noted, “A considerable number of persons, who have little or no physical property to be taxed, yet in their particular fields, prosper far beyond the average citizen. Their children, like those of their tax-paying neighbors, are educated at public expense.” What Neff proposed was no less than a wholesale revision of Texas’ tax code. Neff’s Southern Progressive credentials are apparent. The program would not only raise revenue that would presumably be spent on essential government services like education, it would also redistribute the tax burden more equitably. With reference to economic development, the program would favor Texas companies over out of state companies. The one

---

10Neff Urges State System of Parks,” DMN, May 2, 1923; “Mother Neff Park Given to Citizens, DMN, December 12, 1924.
exception was the oil industry, which was already well developed and highly profitable—a perfect source of revenue.\textsuperscript{11}

Despite Neff’s conciliatory overtures to the legislature, the relationship between the two was often strained. In March, Neff and the legislature had a blow-up over the lack of progress on Neff’s law enforcement program as well as the appropriations bills. When both houses agreed to adjourn on March 13, thus ending the regular session without completing the aforementioned bills, Neff issued a proclamation to reconvene the legislature immediately the next day. Neff rebuked legislators for adjourning “without having made appropriations for the life and operating expenses of the Texas government and her institutions.” He then provided a laundry list of complaints such as the legislature’s failure to pass a law for “punishing outlaws who openly and unfearingly manufacture and sell whisky in Texas.”\textsuperscript{12}

Neff was particularly critical of the Senate in his message. When word of the governor’s decision to reconvene reached that body, one senator immediately rose to have two of Neff’s negative references expunged from the record. As it turned out, several senators had taken offense at Neff’s wording in his criticism. This was especially true in reference to the “Quo Warranto” bill, which was aimed at removing corrupt public officials. The controversial bill would have allowed the governor to remove law enforcement officers from their posts. Neff’s comments made it seem as though the senators were not concerned about the issue. The senators continued to stew and some accused the governor of being “narrow minded” and of trying to “dictate to the senate.” The next day, legislators urged the governor to rescind the order to reconvene on the basis that many members had pressing personal business at home. Finally,


\textsuperscript{12}“Message to the Legislature,” March 9, 1923, Records of the Governor, Texas State Library and Archive, Austin, Texas; “Extra Session of Legislature is Called,” \textit{AS}, March 10, 1923.
Neff backed-down on the matter, although he refused to rescind the order. Instead, the governor simply let the legislature know that if it voted to adjourn again, he would not recall them until sometime between “the middle of April and June 1.”

When the 38th Texas Legislature finally did adjourn in June 1923 after a string of special sessions, it showed rather mixed results. The state’s fiscal crisis remained. Legislators had approved no major new taxes including the proposed income tax. In fact, they had cut the budget to the bone, yet analysts expected revenues to fall short by some $4 million over the following two years. As a result, Neff did not take out his “blue pencil” to any of the appropriations. Instead, he simply filed them with the Secretary of State, and they became law without the governor’s signature. Neff must have realized that he and the legislature had done all that was politically possible, but he was still unwilling to have his name attached to a budget in deficit. Neff took a similar course with the so-called “White Man’s Primary” bill, which kept blacks from voting in the all-important Democratic primary. This too Neff filed without his signature. In both cases, Neff demonstrated his southern Progressivism as he sought good government in the form of fiscal responsibility, while he ignored civil rights.

On the other hand, the legislature passed some important pieces of Progressive legislation during the session. Among them was the passage of the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act. Federal legislation passed in 1921 had provided matching funds for states that authorized funds to establish clinics and distribute hygiene and nutrition information. The act aimed at lowering high infant and child mortality rates and Texas’ entry into the program was a Progressive victory. Another example of Progressive success in Texas was the defeat of

---


the Stroeder bill, which would have prohibited the teaching of evolution in public schools. Thus, two years before the famed Scopes Monkey Trial, Texas allowed the teaching of Darwin’s theory in schools. During the 38th Texas Legislature, the governor and Progressive legislators sought to solve the state’s fiscal problems through fairer and more extensive taxation. Though some new taxes were established, they did not significantly improve the situation. In the final analysis, the move to a more Progressive agenda met with limited success.\textsuperscript{15}

Of course, Neff’s inability to prosecute a significant Progressive agenda lay in the ability of conservative forces to counter it. As previously mentioned, the movement of the Klan into mainstream politics provided many conservatives with a new political voice. After the successful attempt to have Earle B. Mayfield elected to the United States Senate in 1922, the Klan continued to propose and support candidates for office. As governor, Neff frequently received letters of support for various prospective appointees to state office—especially those seeking appointments as judges. In a few cases, Neff received overt endorsements from local Klans. These were hard to miss because of their gaudy Klan letterhead. In one case, J. M. Elliott of Memphis, Texas, was endorsed to fill the bench of the 100th Judicial District. Elliott received many endorsements from friends, acquaintances, and Klan Number 165 in Clarendon, Texas. Generally, prospective judges with as many references as Elliott did receive appointments. Neff, however, rejected him, writing in his letter of explanation, “My failure to appoint you…is in no way a reflection upon you as a man, or as an attorney.” Perhaps it was instead a reflection upon Elliott’s choices of friends. In another case, Neff received an endorsement of N. T. Stubbs by Klan Number 47 in Mexia to the bench of the 87th District. Neff instead appointed J. Earl Bell to

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Bills Advocated by Women Pass,”} \textit{DMN,} February 16, 1923; “Anti-Evolution Bill Promptly Voted Down By House Committee,” \textit{AS,} January 17, 1923.
the position. Though these examples are in no way conclusive that Neff discriminated against Klan-endorsed candidates, it at least indicates that such endorsements did not necessarily help. \(^{16}\)

With the adjournment of the legislature, most of Neff’s constitutional duties ended. As a lame-duck governor, he took on a caretaker role awaiting the election of his successor and began to look ahead to the next chapter of his life. Neff was also able to enjoy some of the benefits of his office and made several visits out of state. In July, the governor took an eighteen-day trip to Panama and Cuba. Upon his return to Austin, supporters greeted Neff warmly, and he noted that he had “been shaking hands with Presidents.” One of Neff’s most important trips was in mid-August to the annual meeting of the Chautauqua Institution in Chautauqua, New York. The movement centered there was part of the larger Social Gospel movement. With its beginning in 1874, the Chautauqua movement had a significant influence on the development of modern liberalism amongst the middle class. By the turn of the century, the movement had branches around the country and flourished everywhere but the South where many found it to be too liberal. Its annual meeting constituted a combination of a college, a summer resort, and a religious meeting. Thus, Neff’s presence at the meeting is interesting on several levels. \(^{17}\)

The Chautauqua movement was closely associated with the women’s club movement of the time. One member of the “old girls” network at Chautauqua was Anna Pennybacker, longtime friend and supporter of the governor and former president of the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs, as well its parent, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs. More importantly, Pennybacker was influential at Chautauqua and helped bring Neff there to speak. By the time of Neff’s New York trip, his name had already begun to be mentioned as a possible

\(^{16}\)Clarendon Klan Number 165 to Neff, March 30, 1923, PNP; Neff to J. M. Elliott, June 8, 1923, PNP; Mexia Klan Number 47 to Neff, March 25, 1923, PNP; Neff to William F. Kerr, April 23, 1923, PNP.

candidate for president or vice-president in 1924. Because of this, Neff said that he would keep his trip non-political and limit his speaking to his favorite topics of prohibition and law enforcement. At the same time, however, Governor Neff avoided comment on prospective presidential nominee Governor Alfred E. Smith’s recent signing of a bill to repeal prohibition in New York State. So, in a way, what Neff did not say was almost as important as what he did say.¹⁸

During his speech at Chautauqua, Neff was in fine form. He began, with an appeal to the basic tenets of both progressivism and the Social Gospel movement, “Life is a battle. Civilization is bought with blood. The story of the human race is one of struggle. Slow as the centuries, constant as time, tragic as death, has been the making of the world’s civilization. Mankind has always moved slowly, but its march has always been, and is now, onward and upward.” Neff continued, “Where the vanguard of civilization camps today, the rear guard camps tomorrow. Through countless ages of mingled glory and gloom, the children of men have marched through rivers of tears and oceans of blood …seeking at all times, by Divine guidance, the light and learning of a higher, a better civilization.” Neff focused the speech on prohibition and its enforcement. Like many Progressives, Neff saw alcohol as the root of much of the crime and violence in society. Thus, he saw prohibition as both a “moral triumph” and a “crowning achievement” in the “steps of progress.” Neff connected the issues of prohibition and law enforcement based on the perceived relationship between crime and alcohol. He went on to condemn the proposed legalization of wine and beer in some states. Here, Neff was referring to Smith’s earlier action, although he never mentioned him by name. Generally, the speech was

often quite eloquent and well targeted to its audience, so it was well received and gained a considerable amount of attention.\textsuperscript{19}

In fact, there was some anticipation of Neff’s speech at Chautauqua. The day before the speech, Neff received a telegram from United Press International in New York City requesting him to wire a copy of it “at our expense.” Other more important people expressed interest in the speech. One of these was Democratic Party leader and former presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan. A few days after the speech, Bryan wrote John F. Marrs of Wichita Falls a letter that Marrs forwarded to the governor’s office. Bryan wrote, “I was very much impressed by Governor Neff. His speech in Chautauqua, New York is perfect both in thought and expression.” Bryan’s interest lent new credibility to the possibility of Neff as a possible candidate for president. Neff received many congratulatory letters after the speech from old friends and colleagues such as Claudia Hightower of the Texas Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, who expressed “great satisfaction.” In the end, Neff thanked Anna Pennybacker for the experience at Chautauqua. He wrote, “For your many acts and words of kindness, I shall ever be grateful. Every moment of my visit to Chautauqua was pleasant and was enjoyed to the fullest extent. To you I am debtor in many ways for the pleasure, the profit, and the honor that were mine.” At the time Neff wrote that, he probably knew exactly how pleasurable the trip had been—but he could not have known just how profitable it would be.\textsuperscript{20}

In October, Neff made another trip out of state. The main purpose of the trip was to attend the National Governor’s Conference held in West Baden, Indiana. In addition, Neff gave an address in Springfield, Illinois, and went on to attend a President’s Conference on Law

\textsuperscript{19}Neff, \textit{Battles of Peace}, 85, 91.

\textsuperscript{20}United Press International to Neff, August 13, 1923, PNP; Claudia Hightower to Neff, August 22, 1923, PNP; William Jennings Bryan to John F. Marrs, August 16, 1923, PNP, Neff to Anna Pennybacker, August 23, 1923, PNP.
Enforcement, Prohibition, and Immigration in Washington, D. C. These events once again put Neff in the spotlight. Neff’s performance at the governor’s conference drew a great deal of attention. The meeting proved to be a stormy one in which two factions surfaced. One faction believed the governors should concentrate their efforts on limiting the Klan, while the other, led by Neff, wanted to focus on enforcement of prohibition laws. Eventually, Neff’s faction held sway. The failure of the conference to address the Klan issue adequately incensed Governor John M. Parker of Louisiana where the organization had been particularly violent. During the course of the debate, Parker threatened to quit the conference, saying that, “the Ku Klux Klan is the greatest issue in America today and that question demands the time and attention of this meeting.” Neff retorted, “I have declared martial law twenty times in various parts of Texas to insure law enforcement …President Coolidge has invited the Governors to Washington to discuss prohibition enforcement and not the Klan, and we therefore should confine ourselves to the purpose of the meeting.” Parker interrupted Neff by saying, “The Ku Klux Klan is seeking to take charge of the Constitution,” and that Neff was thus “encouraging the enemies of the Constitution.” Governor Percival Baxter of Maine, chair of the session, was only able to restore order through “vigorous pounding of the gavel.”

Ultimately, the governor’s conference produced a resolution that placed prohibition and its enforcement above all else. It read, “Observance of law is the fundamental basis of American citizenship and enforcement of the law is the primary duty of every official. National prohibition is now, by constitutional amendment, the law of the land. An overwhelming majority of the citizens of the United States are law-abiding and desirous of the enforcement of law.” The resolution made no mention of the Ku Klux Klan. Neff signed the resolution, but Governor

Parker did not, having followed through on his threat to leave the conference. When the governors moved on to Washington, D. C., observers identified Neff as a “central figure” in the meeting there. At that meeting, Neff reiterated his position from West Baden. When a reporter asked Neff what the main issue of the coming presidential campaign would be, he responded, “Law enforcement. No man may expect election who does not stand for law enforcement and the eighteenth amendment to the Federal Constitution. The people will stand for nothing less.”

Neff’s concentration on the issue of prohibition may have made him seem to be something of a political “one-trick pony.” On the other hand, many potential voters may have liked that. At any rate, national politicians had noticed Neff and he was in a position to capitalize on it.\(^{22}\)

At the close of 1923, and the end of the legislative session, Neff had effectively completed his work as governor. Though the move toward a more Progressive agenda had been largely unsuccessful, the governor enjoyed some major successes such as the establishment of a state park system and the statewide water resources survey. Neff continued to work on both of these issues for many years. The latter of the two was immensely important for Texas’ future as it provided water resources for population growth and economic development. It is also Neff’s strongest credential as a Southern Progressive. At the same time, the governor’s failure to restructure the state’s tax system had a long-term negative effect on its ability to provide services. By the end of 1923, Neff’s hard work as governor had begun to pay off in the form of national political attention. The governor consolidated this political capital by his performance at the National Governor’s Conference and at President Coolidge’s conference in Washington.

With Neff nearing the end of his second and traditionally final term, he looked forward to 1924. As a Progressive, as a proven chief executive, and as an able politician, Neff’s political stock

\(^{22}\)“Memorial Addressed by The Forty-Four [sic] States and Territories of the Union to Calvin Coolidge, President of the United States,” October 19, 1923, PNP; “Texas Executive Central Figure in Gathering of Governors at Capital,” *DMN*, October 21, 1923.\)
was high both at home in Texas and around the country. Neff needed only to decide how best to use his political capital.
Whatever it costs to be Governor, all the cost, large and small, tangible and intangible, real and imaginary, is insignificant as compared with the opportunity...to serve the state you honor, and the people you love, in the highest office within their gifts.

--Pat M. Neff

Pat Neff’s last full year as Governor of Texas should have been anticlimactic. Instead, he became involved in divisive national politics by waging a backdoor campaign for the presidency. William Jennings Bryan’s mention of Neff as a possible Democratic Party presidential candidate in 1923 put the governor in the national spotlight. His performance at the National Governor’s Conference and at President Calvin Coolidge’s conference on prohibition and law enforcement later that year further concentrated the spotlight as Neff cast himself in a leadership role during the two conferences. As 1924 began, Neff looked like a serious contender for either place at the head of the Democratic Party’s ticket. However, in the course of the governor’s backdoor campaign, he made several critical political errors that only served to alienate his Texas political base. In the final analysis, Neff played an important and, thus far, largely forgotten role in the infamous Democratic National Convention of 1924. Furthermore, the mere consideration of Neff for a place on the ticket was indicative of Texas’s growing power and influence in national politics as well as a hint of things to come.

By late 1923, many influential Democrats, including Bryan, thought that their coming convention might be deadlocked. There were two main reasons for this. First, there was the divisive nature of American politics at the time. The conflict between rural conservatives and urban Progressives had become personified by the Democratic Party’s two leading presidential
candidates, William Gibbs McAdoo of Georgia and Al Smith of New York. McAdoo was favored by conservatives especially in the South, but he also had some appeal to Progressives for having served in the Woodrow Wilson Administration as Secretary of the Treasury and as Railroad Administrator during the First World War. McAdoo was married to Wilson’s daughter Eleanor and had been favored by many in 1920 because of his strong connection to Wilson. Unfortunately, Wilson was late to announce that he would not run for a third term that year, and McAdoo, out of respect for the president, did not enter the race. Meanwhile, urban Progressives favored Al Smith, Governor of New York. Smith was the polar opposite of McAdoo, being urban, Progressive, and anti-prohibition. Smith was also closely associated with Tammany Hall and, thus, the big-city machine politics that rural conservatives disliked. To further complicate the situation, Smith was Roman Catholic, and McAdoo had received Klan backing. The candidacies of these two men were highly representative of the divisions within both the Democratic Party and the nation itself.¹

The second, and most important, factor was the Democratic Party’s “two-thirds” rule, the requirement that two-thirds of the delegates support the nominee. Thus, with a total of 1,098 delegates, 732 votes were required to nominate as opposed to a simple majority of 550 had the rule not been in place. The “unit rule” added further complication by allowing state delegations to cast all of their votes for the candidate holding a majority of support within the delegation. Not all states used the rule, but it served to keep candidates from splitting a delegation’s vote and also kept the total vote from reflecting real support. Texas was one of the delegations that used the rule. In fact, the Texas delegation was popularly known as the “Faithful Forty” for consistently casting all forty of its votes for one candidate. Texas Democrats were quite proud of

this moniker, and many were reluctant to depart from the practice. This combination of factors practically assured contentious conventions in both Waco and New York City. Many, including Bryan, thought the result would be the nomination of a “dark horse” candidate at the national convention.  

Governor Neff was first suggested as a possible presidential candidate in mid-1923. One of the earliest public suggestions of Neff’s name for national office came from his former private secretary and long-time advisor, R. B. Walthall, in a circular letter sent to Texas newspaper editors in June. According to Walthall, the governor should be considered “as a possible standard bearer of the National Democratic Party for President of the United States.” Walthall continued, “His strength of character, his devotion to justice, his fearlessness and humility in service of this people. His sagacity in dealing with difficult political situations enabled him to…overcome every obstacle both in elections and in policies of administration.” Walthall concluded that these qualities made Neff “the most available candidate for the Democratic nomination.” In the course of his comments, Walthall also managed to invoke the name of Woodrow Wilson while asserting Neff’s ability to “lead the people of the United States in the onward and upward movement of civilization and progress.” Considering Walthall’s closeness to Neff, and the nature of the letter, this could be considered a “trial balloon” for a Neff candidacy.

The biggest boost to a Neff candidacy came in the fall of 1923 when William Jennings Bryan proposed the possibility that the governor could lead the Democratic Party’s ticket. Bryan had been impressed by Neff’s speech at the Chautauqua Institute in August in which the

---


3“Suggests Neff as President,” *DMN*, June 19, 1923.
governor had staunchly defended prohibition and its enforcement. In a letter to the editor of the *Jacksonville [Florida] Observer*, a copy of which was forwarded to Neff’s office, Bryan wrote, “Governor Neff is the chief executive of the biggest state in the South. He defeated ex-Senator Bailey, and defeated him largely on the liquor question. He is on the people’s side on public questions and he has the courage to take his position and risk his future upon the righteousness of his position.” Bryan concluded that Neff was “the kind of man we need” and closed the letter with “WHY NOT GOVERNOR NEFF!” Of course, any kind of endorsement by a man of Bryan’s stature resulted in considerable attention being placed on the governor.4

Bryan did not give a formal endorsement of Neff, mentioning other possible candidates as well, but the governor’s friends were understandably excited by the news. M. S. Lemly of Temple wrote a letter to Bryan in which he stated, “Your friends and admirers in this state are glad to note that you are avowing an encouraging appreciation of the fact that Texas possesses a presidential possibility in the person of Pat M. Neff.” Lemly sent a copy of the letter to the governor’s office with a notation on the bottom addressed to Neff’s private secretary, Espa Stanford. The notation read, “Tell Mr. W. [Walthall] that the Downs family here and Mr. H. C. Glenn will also write letters to Mr. Bryan. Mr. Glenn has twice met Mr. B.” Clearly, Neff’s friends were working on his behalf to gain additional support from Bryan. In addition, it appears that the efforts were in some way being coordinated through Walthall, who had been responsible for releasing the Neff trial balloon.5

Some of Neff’s friends, although supportive of his candidacy, warned against waging an informal, or backdoor, campaign. Attorney J. W. Madden of Crockett in a letter to Texas

4“William Jennings Bryan Applauds the Masterly Effort of Governor Neff of Texas and Declares he Would Make a Great President of the United States,” PNP.
5M. S. Lemly to W. J. Bryan, August 15, 1923, PNP.
Secretary of State R. L. Staples wrote, “I note with pleasure and satisfaction the efforts you are making in behalf of the governor’s candidacy, if he should finally enter the race. I hope you and other friends will keep the good work going.” Madden also assumed “that the mention of his name is something more than a mere compliment.” At this point Madden warned, “In other words, my doctrine is that a thing that is worth having is worth fighting for, and a ‘half-hearted’ fight rarely ever gets you anywhere.” Madden went on to make the point that it would be much easier for Neff’s friends to work for him, and more importantly, raise money, if the governor waged a formal campaign. This was probably the best piece of political advice that Neff got during his flirtation with national politics. At the top of Madden’s letter was a notation “204/ N-P.” This is consistent with the filing system in Governor Neff’s office; correspondence was filed with reference to subject matter and the files were numbered. File 204 was one of Neff’s political files that generally dealt with feelings of sentiment, often personal, but sometimes political. By November 1923, when Madden’s letter was received in Neff’s office, his staff had begun to add the N-P designation to letters related to the governor’s possible run for the presidency. They were clearly maintaining a special file for such correspondence.6

Although support for Neff’s candidacy began to solidify late in 1923, the governor did not make a formal announcement. In December, Neff and Bryan had arranged to meet under the guise of a duck hunt to be hosted by W L Moody, Jr., a mutual friend of both men. Bryan wrote to Neff, “It will be a great pleasure to take this trip with you; it will give us an opportunity to visit our old friends the Moody’s, and at the same time settle all the difficult questions.” At this point, Bryan got to the crux of the matter, “You may have noticed a statement in the paper that I am to present the name of a Southern candidate to the convention …I want to make an argument

---

6J. W. Madden to R. L. Staples, November 10, 1923, PNP.
that will refute the long standing argument against the nomination of a Southern man.” Bryan continued, “This argument will be of advantage to any Southern man who may be a candidate. As the man whom I shall present is bone dry and Progressive, my argument will be of advantage to every Southern candidate who is bone dry and Progressive.” Bryan seemed to indicate that he had someone in mind when he stated that the man he would present “is” bone dry and Progressive. Neff was very much “bone-dry” and “Progressive”; nevertheless, Bryan’s statement is still vague with respect to a candidate. Bryan concluded by offering Neff good wishes and advice as he wrote, “I hope that you will go to the convention with the delegates from your state and as many more as you can secure.”

In mid-December, Neff received the official presidential endorsement from the Texas Democratic State Executive Committee. The committee called Neff “one possessing the wisdom strength, courage, and sense of justice that would make a great President and in whose personality are happily combined all the elements of character ability and magnetism…in the ranks of democracy today.” At this point, Neff had received the full support of the Texas Democratic Party—all he had to do was maintain it. Shortly after Neff received this nomination, he once again took his case to the people of Texas, letting it be known that the intended to make a series of speeches all over the state in the coming spring for unexplained reasons. There was considerable conjecture about the purpose of Neff’s tour. Some thought the tour would precede a special session of the legislature that Neff intended to call in 1924. Of course, many surmised that it had something to do with the Neff’s possible presidential campaign. A “friend” of the governor noted that usually lame ducks “remain quiet” during their last year in office “unless they should be candidates for other public office.” Neff’s friend concluded that the governor was

---

7Bryan to Neff, December 22, 1923, PNP.
“determined that such obscurity shall not come to him, and will make a report to the people in person and thus refuse to be forgotten. This would put him in line for public office in the future if he should desire to aspire again.” Thus, Neff became an undeclared presidential candidate.⁸

Neff maintained his contact with Bryan, sending him a telegram on January 2, setting the date for the duck hunt during the last week of January. Unfortunately, a few days later, it became known that Bryan intended to nominate an unnamed Floridian at the national convention. In spite of this news, Neff refused to stop the effort to get Bryan’s support, and the duck hunt went on as scheduled. Neff later recalled how on the morning following the hunt, he arose to find a duck decoy on his breakfast plate. According to Neff, Bryan explained, “It has been decided that each person is to eat for breakfast the duck killed by him on the previous day.” Neff responded, “Jealousy makes even distinguished men do foolish things. The report that I had never fired a gun almost cost me the governorship, and now my expert marksmanship is about to rob me of my breakfast.” This is Neff’s only public mention of the meeting, and it is made totally outside the context of presidential politics. The hunting trip itself was admittedly out of character for Neff who was clearly using the opportunity to cozy up to Bryan as well as to curry favor with the average gun-toting sportsman—wherever they may have been.⁹

Bryan’s visit to Texas also included a speaking tour to gather support before the fall elections. Before the Democratic leader left the state, Neff took one last opportunity to talk to him, traveling to Galveston to meet Bryan’s train. A photographer from the Austin American captured the meeting, and the paper published the photos. One of the photos shows Neff and

---


⁹Neff to Bryan, January 2, 1924, PNP; “Bryan Not to Nominate Governor Neff,” AS, January 8, 1924; Neff, The Battles of Peace, 251-2; See also Ted Ownby, Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Ownby’s thesis is that Southern “old boys” culture of hunting, fishing, and womanizing was in conflict with both religion and Progressivism. Neff proves the point perfectly and he was clearly aware of the problem during this episode.
Bryan looking at a piece of paper. In the caption below the photo, the paper speculated that the two were looking at a diagram of Madison Square Garden, scene of the upcoming 1924 Democratic National Convention. At about the same time, Neff was asked by a reporter whom he would support for president. Neff replied, “The best Progressive, aggressive, forward-looking, law-enforcing democrat that can be found between the oceans is the man that will get my vote for president.” The governor’s typically cryptic response probably left many wondering if he was talking about himself. Neff could hardly be blamed if he was; his photograph, as well as a discussion of his presidential possibilities, had already appeared in the “National Affairs” section of Time Magazine.10

As would be expected, William Gibbs McAdoo was Neff’s chief rival in Texas. By early 1924, the Tea Pot Dome scandal had begun to unfold. Unfortunately for McAdoo, his name came up in the congressional investigation of the scandal. During the testimony of California oilman Edward L. Doheny, it was learned that McAdoo had been paid $250,000 to represent his company in Washington concerning a Mexican oil deal. At the time, McAdoo was a partner in the Los Angeles law firm of McAdoo, Cotton, and Franklin. The allegations against McAdoo had immediate political repercussions. Up to this point, the scandal had been limited to Republicans, but now they tainted the man many considered the Democratic front-runner. McAdoo decided to meet the charges head-on when he testified a few weeks later, and afterwards at a meeting in Chicago he and some of his key supporters agreed that he should

10. “Austin American Presents First Pictures to be Published of Bryan and Neff’s Meeting,” Austin American, February 1, 1924; The clipping appears in one of two scrapbooks that Neff’s office compiled between December 1923 and November 1924. The scrapbooks are part of the Pat Neff Papers; “Governor Neff Goes to Waco to Pay Poll Tax,” DMN, January 29, 1924; “National Affairs”, Time Magazine, December 24, 1923, 2.
continue his presidential bid. In the end, nothing came of the allegations against McAdoo. Nevertheless, they were quickly noted in Austin.\textsuperscript{11}

On February 1, 1924, Silliman Evans, a reporter for the \textit{Fort Worth Star-Telegram} in Washington, sent a telegram to Neff concerning McAdoo’s connection to the scandal. Evans wrote, “Final knock-out blow delivered to McAdoo in the Senate this afternoon when news of his being attorney for Doheny during corrupt oil deals. Congratulations. Hit the ball.” This last line is obviously a baseball analogy implying that Neff had been given a pitch that was “low, slow, and over the plate.” All Neff had to do was to connect, and the result would be a homerun. A few days later Neff replied to Evans’s telegram. The governor noted that he had just returned from a speaking engagement in Chicago and had just accepted another in Denver. Neff wrote that he enjoyed “getting out of the state now and then and seeing how the other fellow does things.” Neff also noted his visit with Bryan and added, “Things are moving along nicely here.” It appears that Neff was enjoying a new role and looking forward to better things.\textsuperscript{12}

In many ways, Evans’ baseball analogy was fitting. If the disclosure of McAdoo’s association with the Doheny oil deal was the first pitch, it was also the first strike against Neff. Generally, Neff made the mistake of speaking too strongly against McAdoo based on what proved to be weak charges. McAdoo was still widely popular in Texas as Neff began to separate himself from his perceived rival. During a trip out of state in mid-January, a reporter had asked Neff if he supported McAdoo in the coming election—and the answer had seemed to be yes. Neff was asked the same question when he returned to Texas and replied, “The Washington


\textsuperscript{12}Silliman Evans to Neff, February 1, 1924, PNP; Neff to Evans, February 13, 1924, PNP; Evans was a close friend of Amon Carter, publisher of the \textit{Star-Telegram}. Evans went on to become publisher of the \textit{Nashville Tennessean}. 

214
report that I committed myself to McAdoo for President was without the slightest foundation in fact as was the statement that I favored Texas sending an uninstructed delegation. I did not, and have not said, whether I was for or against McAdoo.” During this period, Neff must have been formulating his course of action, hence the apparent waffling. In the end, Neff decided to campaign against McAdoo and for an uninstructed Texas delegation to the Democratic National Convention. Both of these proved to be critical mistakes as the governor began his statewide speaking campaign in the spring of 1924.13

Neff’s tour of the state generated controversy almost immediately because he began to charge that McAdoo was “unfit” to be President. In a speech at Groesbeck, Neff elaborated while openly comparing himself to his would-be opponent, “I’m not saying McAdoo is not a gentlemen or a lawyer, but I do say that he is not the proper man to lead the Democratic Party. He has been the paid attorney for the corrupting influences while I haven’t received a cent.” B. C. Brown of Fort Worth was one of many who were taken aback by Neff’s actions. Brown wrote, “Really I was surprised when I learned you were going to stump the state against William Gibbs McAdoo…I said to my friend his [Neff’s] political enemies will just give him enough rope so he can hang himself and sure enough, they have.” Brown continued, “I’ll call your hand before you get thru throwing your dirty mud. You are not talking about Joe Bailey, but McAdoo…. I voted for you and you have made a splendid governor, but you just happen to get a hold of the wrong man this time.” Neff thanked Brown for his letter but noted, “If the spirit of your letter…had been just a little different…I would have appreciated it more.” Brown was probably echoing the sentiment of many and, as evidenced by the letter, Neff’s actions were

13“Neff Denies Rumor He Favored McAdoo,” *DMN*, January 22, 1924.
causing him to lose political support. Despite letters like Brown’s, Neff continued to wage his campaign.\(^{14}\)

McAdoo made a campaign swing through Texas in mid-April, and many Texans, of course, expected their governor to welcome the important visitor, especially such an esteemed Democrat. Neff probably further alienated the Democrats of his state by his disrespectful treatment of McAdoo during the tour, refusing even to introduce the visitor at any of his speaking engagements. This was in spite of the fact that Neff had reportedly been offered an “uninstructed” delegation that would eventually go to McAdoo. During his visit, McAdoo criticized Governor Neff for his pursuit of an uninstructed delegation. In a speech in San Antonio, McAdoo said, “It is a matter of keen regret that Governor Neff has taken the position that the people of Texas should not instruct their delegates.” McAdoo warned, “It will not do to split the forces of Progressive democracy in Texas on this question.” In this case, Neff’s actions were, at best, not in keeping with the ideal of southern hospitality. At worst, Neff’s actions probably looked petty and self-serving.\(^{15}\)

The stated reason for Neff’s speaking tour was his fight for an uninstructed delegation. This, the governor said, he was “definitely, decidedly, and unalterably” for. In a speech in Fort Worth, Neff began by stating, “I am not out for the candidacy of any office…or any political party,” and then quickly moved on to the issue of the delegates. “The thing is to instruct our delegates in the fundamentals of democracy, and when they are up there, let them vote for the cause and not the individual.” Neff argued, “I am not willing for the forty Texas delegates to vote for the man I may have in mind as the best man for the office, when he may not be in the

\(^{14}\)Neff Challenges McAdoo to Show Fitness to Lead,” \textit{AS}, April 17, 1924; “Governor Assails McAdoo-Underwood,” \textit{DMN}, April 19, 1924; B. C. Brown to Neff, April 25, 1924, PNP; Neff to Brown, May 2, 1924, PNP;

\(^{15}\)Governor Neff Refuses to Introduce McAdoo as Candidate Tours Texas,” \textit{DMN}, April 12, 1924; “McAdoo Again Argues for Instruction,” \textit{HC}, April 13, 1924.
running when the last vote is cast.” Finally, in a dig at McAdoo, Neff added, “I would hate for Texas to have the delegation go north and find that the man they were instructed to vote for was in jail or out on bond.” Statements like these greatly disturbed Texas Democrats who were largely for McAdoo. So, in the weeks leading up to the county conventions, Neff used much of his political capital as he argued for sending uninstructed delegates to New York in a thinly veiled presidential bid.\textsuperscript{16}

Unfortunately for Neff, he managed to alienate not only the party faithful, but also the party functionaries. One of these was Thomas B. Love, Democratic National Committeeman from Texas. In a speech at Dallas’ City Hall Auditorium, Love said, “For Texas…not to send an instructed delegation to the national convention would be an advertisement…that Texas has no nominee for the presidency.” Love added, “If Texas instructs for McAdoo…it means we will have a dry candidate for the presidency. If Texas does not send an instructed delegation, it means placing the nomination in the hands of the wets.” Here Love probably had much sympathy from conservatives on the prohibition issue alone, but implicit in his statement was the even stronger argument that Texas would essentially be letting others choose a candidate if it sent an uninstructed delegation. Love was also investigating Neff’s use of state funds. A week prior to the speech, Love telegraphed State Comptroller Lon Smith concerning the governor’s travel expenses. In the course of the speech, Love accused Neff of improper usage of state funds for both travel and phone expenses. Prior to this, Neff and Love had enjoyed a happy working relationship; by late April, they seemed to be enemies. In the first week of May, Love ran

\textsuperscript{16}“Neff has a Tilt with McAdoo Man,” \textit{DMN}, April 25, 1924.
advertisements detailing Neff’s “misstatements.” Love was one of the most powerful and influential Democrats in Texas, and Neff needed him.17

Neff’s speaking campaign lasted about three weeks before the county conventions that were to decide who would represent them at the state convention and, more importantly, how they would be instructed to vote once there. On the eve of the county meetings, Governor Neff issued a statement. It read: “It is my firm conviction that the interest of Texas Democracy can better be served by the selection of an uninstructed delegation than by the naming of a delegation tied to the apron strings of either of the two candidates now seeking to have our forty votes.” Of his own personal interest in the endeavor, Neff wrote, “Had I wanted the delegation instructed for me, or had my object been to get myself named as a delegate to the convention, I know how that could have been done without making a single speech anywhere on any subject.” The irony was that, on this last point, Neff was undoubtedly right. Apparently, Neff’s sly, back-door approach to presidential politics was not appreciated by Texas Democrats. McAdoo’s victory was “decisive,” and he carried Bexar, Dallas, Harris, and Tarrant counties, the largest in the state. Many political observers saw the vote as a “rebuke” to the governor. Several counties had gone so far as to adopt resolutions condemning Neff’s actions. Despite Neff’s campaign, the county conventions decided that they would be “Seeing it Through with McAdoo.”18

As the state Democratic convention approached, many wondered if the governor would participate, but on May 7, sources announced that Neff would participate in the convention to be held in his hometown of Waco on May 27. In a speech, Neff expressed the opinion that he

17"Love Scores Neff’s Delegate Campaign,” DMN, April 29, 1924; Thomas B. Love to Lon Smith, April 22, 1924, PNP; Lon Smith to Love, April 22, 1924, PNP; “Governor Neff’s Misstatements,” Advertisement, DMN, May 3, 1924.

18"Governor Neff has No Apology to Make,” DMN, May 3, 1924; “McAdoo Choice in Precinct Conventions,” DMN, May 4, 1924; “McAdoo Delegations are Victorious in Precinct Meetings,” HC, May 4, 1924; “Seeing it Through with McAdoo” was the would-be campaign slogan for McAdoo in 1920.
“opposed too much harmony” at the upcoming convention. With regard to his earlier efforts to gain an uninstructed delegation to the national convention, Neff said, “I suppose I am the happiest man in the country; I don’t want anything at all politically. I have been saying just what I wanted to say because I wanted to say it, and I don’t give a darn whether it pleases anybody or not.” When the convention did begin, Neff himself became an issue. Neff’s supporters wanted to send him as a delegate to the national convention, but his opponents, who were still bitter over the governor’s actions earlier in the year, opposed it. Eventually named a non-voting “delegate-at-large,” Neff apparently felt the need to be his own man and declined the seat in the delegation, probably because it was to be instructed for McAdoo. The day after the convention, Neff’s old friend and advisor, G. W. Barcus, wrote the governor concerning its outcome: “I want to congratulate you on your action in the convention…I was very glad indeed that you refused to be sent as a delegate under the instructions that the convention voted. I was proud that you did not retract, because I did not think there was anything for you to retract.” At least, Neff’s diehard supporters were still behind him. Though Neff was not apologetic for his campaign against McAdoo and for an uninstructed delegation, the loss of support from Neff’s political base resulting from the episode constituted a “second strike” against him.  

In the aftermath of the state convention, many wondered whether Neff would attend the national convention. Love had given Neff a ticket to attend the convention, but apparently Neff was ambivalent about attending until one of his political contacts helped him make a decision. In mid-May, Chesley Jurney, a fellow Waco native who served as an aide in the office of Senator Royal Copeland of New York, sent Neff a three-page letter describing the then-current insider

19“Neff to Take Part in Session at Waco,” DMN, May 8, 1924; “Neff Opposed to too Much Harmony,” DMN, May 22, 1924; “State Convention Opens with Harmony on Surface but Fight on Neff Underneath, HC, May 27, 1924; “Decide on Neff as Delegate to National Democratic Meet,” DMN, May 27, 1924; G. W. Barcus to Neff, May 28, 1924, PNP.
thought on Democratic Party politics. The main theme of the letter was that McAdoo would not be nominated. A few days prior to the beginning of the convention, Neff wired Jurney from Austin about the likelihood of McAdoo’s nomination. Jurney wired back: “There is not the slightest possibility of McAdoo’s nomination. Everybody here admits he has no real chance. A dark horse is certain to be selected. You must come to the convention by all means. We will not take no for an answer.” It is not clear who Jurney meant by “we,” but it was enough to get Neff on a train to New York City.20

When Neff arrived at the convention site on June 21, political observers awaited the outcome of the battle between McAdoo and Smith. Meanwhile, pundits speculated who the dark-horse candidate would be if the frontrunners did not get the nomination. Among those named were; John W. Davis, a congressman from West Virginia; E. Carter Glass, a senator from Virginia; James M. Cox, the 1920 nominee; and Oscar W. Underwood, a senator from Alabama. Neff’s name was not mentioned, probably because of his alienation from the Texas delegation. Though Neff said he was there only as a “spectator,” many feared the governor would continue his crusade against McAdoo. This included, ironically, Love who had supplied Neff with the pass. In a statement to the press, Love said, “There is to my mind, nothing less harmful, or more helpful to the cause of Mr. McAdoo than a broadside directed at him by Governor Neff.” Of course, many of those attending the convention questioned why Neff was even there after having turned-down the offer to attend as an alternate delegate. Neff’s opponents, also McAdoo supporters, had good reason to question the governor’s motives.21

20. Texas Delegation Firm for McAdoo, *DMN*, June 22, 1924; Chesley Jurney to Neff, May 18, 1924, PNP; Neff to Chesley W. Jurney, June 14, 1924, PNP; Jurney to Neff, June 14, 1924, PNP.

21. “Favorite Sons’ Partisans Await Outcome of McAdoo-Smith Tug-of-War,” *DMN*, June 22, 1924; “McAdoo Holds Lead in Pre-Convention Experts’ Analysis,” *DMN*, June 22, 1924; Love’s statement appears here as originally printed. However, the article mentioned that Love was “peeved” at Neff. It is likely that the words “more” and “less” were confused. Love was a McAdoo supporter; “Texas Delegation Reaches New York,” *DMN*,
On June 22, Neff made one more critical error. The governor released a statement to the press in which he denounced not just McAdoo but Smith as well. Neff’s statement reads, “The Democratic Party meets tomorrow to name a candidate who should and who can win. The selection of either Mr. McAdoo or Governor Smith means defeat for the party. Smith is too wet. McAdoo is too oily.” So, after successfully alienating both the conservative and Progressive wings of the Democratic Party, Neff made an important point. According to the governor, “The unfortunate division of our party at this moment between these two impossible candidates has caused the delegates to overlook temporarily the strength and virtue of many able and better fitted men such as Davis, Copeland, Ralston, Baker, and [Nebraska Governor Charles W.] Bryan.” Whether or not Neff had himself in mind, at this point, is unknown. Shortly after Neff released his statement, a reporter asked William Jennings Bryan about his earlier endorsement of Governor Neff. Bryan responded, “I don’t care to discuss that.” When prodded, Bryan said, “When I complimented Governor Neff some time ago and said he was good presidential material, a lot of people construed it as meaning that I didn’t think any one else would fit the place.” In fact, Bryan had mentioned other possibilities, but now he distanced himself from Neff. This was Neff’s third strike—and he was out.\textsuperscript{22}

The 1924 Democratic National Convention convened on June 23 and soon found that, as predicted, the two-thirds rule had created a deadlock. Both the McAdoo and Smith camps were understandably nervous. In the course of trying to get enough votes to win the nomination, the Smith campaign began to look for a way to present a balanced ticket in order to overcome the deadlock. At some point, a “special messenger” was dispatched to bring Neff to Smith’s New

\textsuperscript{22}“Governor Pat Neff Scores Candidacy of McAdoo-Smith,” \textit{DMN}, June 24, 1924; “Bryan Reticent when Reminded of Recent Laudation of Governor Neff,” \textit{DMN}, June 25, 1924.
York office. It was later rumored that the Smith campaign was considering proposing Neff as a vice-presidential candidate. Of course, by this time, Neff had probably alienated his own political base to the point he was not a viable candidate. The nomination never came. On July 9, McAdoo and Smith released their delegates from their pledges. The convention had gone through one hundred roll call votes with no candidate chosen. Finally, the next day, the convention nominated John W. Davis for the presidency, and Charles W. Bryan, William Jennings’ Bryan’s brother, for the vice-presidency. A dark horse candidate from the small state of West Virginia had won the nomination.23

Neff had to have speculated about what went wrong. At the beginning of the year, he had looked like a strong possibility for the Democratic presidential nomination. Instead of going on the campaign trail, however, the governor remained in Texas. Neff seems to have gotten it in his mind that he could not run a formal campaign and be considered a dark horse. Perhaps if he had taken J. W. Madden’s advice, and waged a formal “front-door” campaign he could possibly have gone to the Democratic National Convention with delegates of his own. On the other hand, if Neff had not stumped the state in opposition to McAdoo he would not have alienated so many Texas Democrats in the process. If Neff had done nothing and simply waited until the convention, perhaps he could have had the full support of the Texas delegation once McAdoo released them. Neff could have been the dark horse nominee. Surely, the popular governor of a large and increasingly influential state like Texas would have made a better candidate than a congressman from a small state like West Virginia. Perhaps Neff could have made a good vice-
presidential candidate as well. Smith’s consideration of Neff, despite the political realities, bears this out.

In the end, what went wrong was that Neff wasted valuable political capital on a needless fight against McAdoo in Texas. It was both uncharacteristic of Neff—and politically deadly. In all likelihood, it was already too late for Neff before he even reached New York City. His treatment of organized labor and lackluster stand on the Klan likely tainted him with liberal Progressives. Neff’s campaign against McAdoo alienated everyone else. Texas’ grassroots Democrats, represented by the delegates on the floor of the convention, and state party leaders like Love, who were to be among the dealmakers in the event of a hung convention, could have provided the necessary support for a Neff candidacy if only he had not estranged them at every turn. Ironically, Neff could have made an effective running mate for Smith. Smith was urban, Catholic, “wet,” and liberal Progressive; Neff was rural, Protestant, “dry” and Southern Progressive. The two were near polar opposites who would have brought philosophical and regional balance to the democratic ticket. Nevertheless, it was not to be—Neff had made too many mistakes.

Had Neff’s name been offered as a presidential candidate, a nominating speech was already written. It proclaimed, “Sitting under the dome of the great State House of the imperial, rock-ribbed, democratic State of Texas is the one man for whom the eyes of the nation are now searching. Pat Neff, the present Governor of Texas, is a born executive with a wonderful grasp…of all the problems of the state, nation, and world.” The consideration of Neff for the presidency is of interest to historians because it may have marked an important step in Texas’ rising importance in presidential politics. By this time, the state’s growing wealth and influence meant that Texas candidates could attract funding and bring regional balance to national tickets.
During the 1924 Democratic Convention, one of Smith’s key advisors was his campaign manager, Franklin D. Roosevelt. When Roosevelt himself was nominated for president in 1932, he chose Texan John Nance Garner as his running mate. It was a winning combination. The same strategy was also used successfully by John F. Kennedy in 1960 and Ronald Reagan in 1980. In the past sixty years, Texas has given the country four presidents.24

Neff returned to Texas, leaving the excitement of national politics and going back to the position of a lame duck governor in his last few months in office. He dutifully sent his congratulatory letter to Davis and campaigned for him in the fall. In a letter to J. V. Mc Clintic of the Democratic National Committee, Neff graciously wrote, “You may assign me to the territory you feel I may be of greatest service.” In Neff’s farewell address as governor, he said, “During these four gladsome years, my purpose in life has been strengthened, my heart made mellow and my soul enriched. I am going to forget the piercing thorns and those who thrust them and remember only the flowers and those who gave them.” In his final year of office, Governor Neff concentrated on developing the state park system that he had created. He also worked to improve education with a statewide survey of schools and the creation of a special commission to study its findings. Meanwhile, Neff’s administration commissioned surveys of the state’s prisons and mental institutions.25

In the final analysis, Neff’s administration was highly influential on the development of modern Texas. Expansion of education, parks, and water resources were all crucial to building Texas’ future. However, Neff was influential in other profound ways. As governor, Neff had

---

24“Pat Neff for President” Undated, PNP, The speech is signed by Larry Mills of Austin. A notation at the top reads: “Written to be used by the Texas delegation if he had been nominated for President”; Neff to John W. Davis, July 12, 1924, PNP; J. V. Mc Clintic to Neff, August 25, 1924, PNP; Neff to Mc Clintic, August 30, 1924, PNP; There is some contention on the number of American presidents from Texas. Dwight D. Eisenhower was born in Texas but never held office in the state. George H.W. Bush was a Texas politician but was born in Connecticut. Only Lyndon Johnson and George W. Bush were both born and elected to office in Texas.

25“Neff Retiring, Says He Kept the Faith,” DMN, January 21, 1925.
worked to maintain good relations with Mexican officials, particularly President Alvaro Obregón. In September of 1923, Texas suffragist Anna Pennybacker wrote Neff requesting a letter of introduction to Obregón on behalf of suffragist leader Carrie Chapman Catt. Neff wrote a glowing letter noting that Catt likely needed “no introduction” as she was “one of the leaders of world affairs.” At the time, Catt was seeking to bring woman suffrage to other countries and was organizing a tour of Latin America on behalf of the Pan-American Association for the Advancement of Women, an organization sponsored by the League of Women Voters. Catt cancelled the Mexican portion of the trip citing the “somewhat unsettled political positions” in post-revolutionary Mexico. The country was then experiencing the death throes of a bloody revolution. It is important to note that following the Mexican Revolution and the interference and incursion of the Wilson administration, coupled with the subsequent seizure of American property in the country, United States-Mexican relations were strained. Conversely, thanks to Neff’s efforts, including his trade visit to Mexico in 1920, Texas-Mexican relations were at least on the road to repair. For Catt’s purposes, Neff’s name may well have carried more weight in Mexico City than did even President Coolidge’s.²⁶

In a similar case, Neff wrote a letter of introduction to Governor Arnulfo Gonzáles of the Mexican state of Coahuila for Texas historian Eugene C. Barker. At the time, Barker’s research interests focused on colonial Texas. Under Mexican rule, Texas was administered as part of Coahuila. Barker needed access to the Coahuila State Archives—hence the letter to Gonzáles.

Neff explained Barker’s work and intentions and reassured Gonzáles that Barker had “considerable experience working in the archives of the various states of your country, and in the National Collection at Mexico City.” Neff and Barker had apparently talked at length about the letter. Neff closed, “Dr. Barker is one of the foremost historical scholars in this state. He is an excellent gentleman. I am glad to have the privilege of making him known to you. He is my friend.” Barker’s research in Coahuila directly contributed to three projects he was working on. The first, and most important, was an edited compilation of the correspondence of Stephen F. Austin published as the *Austin Papers*. This work is among the most frequently cited primary sources of Texas historians. The second work was a biography of Austin entitled *The Life of Stephen F. Austin* published in 1925. The third work was *Mexico and Texas, 1821-1936* published in 1928. In addition, the research also contributed to other works by Barker and countless other scholars. Thus, Neff not only played an important role in Texas history, but also played an important, if minor, role in its study.27

Neff was an admirer of Texas history and was both a subscriber and contributor to its myth and memory. As governor, and as one of the most acknowledged orators in the state, Neff frequently spoke on topics of Texas history. Sometimes Neff made such speeches for political purposes, but generally they were made on special occasions and designed to appeal to other proud Texans. The best examples may be found in the book *Making Texans*, a compilation of the former governor’s speeches. Among these are, “The Texas Cowboy,” “The Declaration of Texas Independence,” “The Texas Constitution,” and “The Texas Flag.” On more sentimental occasions, Neff spoke on such topics as “The Texas Homestead,” “Our Pioneer Mothers,” “Our Texas Bird—The Mockingbird,” “Our Texas Flower—The Blue Bonnet,” and “Our Texas

Tree—The Pecan.” On more political occasions, ones frequently requiring a Progressive undertone, Neff spoke on “Titanic Texas,” “The Twin Factors of Texas Wealth,” and “What Texas Makes, Makes Texas.” Neff may not be the most proficient governor at his use of Texas myth and memory—but *Making Texans* presents a good case for it. At any rate, Neff certainly made contributions to both the collective myths and memories of his contemporaries.28

In the waning days of the Neff administration, the governor made one more important contribution to Texas history—the appointment of a special, all woman, Supreme Court. In January of 1925, Governor Neff specifically appointed the court to deal with the case of *W. T. Johnson et al. v. J. M. Darr et al.* The case centered on two pieces of land near El Paso and whether or not they were owned by trustees of a fraternal organization, the Woodmen of the World (WOW). The case wound its way through Texas courts until it reached the state Supreme Court. There it ran into an unusual problem: all three of the court’s justices were members of WOW and constitutionally disqualified from hearing the case. Governor Neff was thus authorized to appoint a special court. Ironically, many state officials, including many of its judges and Neff himself, were members of WOW and had conflicts of interest in the case. Appointing justices to the court was extremely challenging. Neff settled on a novel approach, since WOW was a *fraternal* organization, he could appoint women to the court without fear of conflicts of interest. Neff appointed three women attorneys, all established in their careers for more than seven years. These included Chief Justice Hortense Ward and Associate Justices, Ruth Brazzil and Hattie Henenberg. The court met on January 8, 1925 in the state Capitol to discuss procedure and heard arguments beginning on January 30. In May, the court announced

its decision and awarded both tracts of land to WOW. As the court deliberated, Texas inaugurated its first woman governor, Miriam A. Ferguson.  

Much had changed for Texas women in four short years. Though Neff had not supported the suffrage movement during the crucial year of 1919-1920, he certainly became much more supportive of women later. Neff was the first Texas governor elected with the help of women voters. He, in turn, appointed the first all-woman Supreme Court. The appointment met with the approval of many Texans—especially its women. Edith Metcalfe of Dallas was one of those who wrote the governor complementing him. Neff replied, “I am in hopes that this recognition of the womanhood of the state as attorneys will be helpful in many ways to those women wherever they may be, who are fighting single-handed the battles of life.” The sentiment was supportive of women as a whole, but Neff also mentored some very accomplished women in particular. These included Senator Margie Neal, the first woman elected to the Texas Senate. Espa Stanford, served as Neff’s private secretary, a role then equivalent to the governor’s chief of staff. Stanford was the first women to serve in such a position and walked in the shoes of the famous “Colonel” Edward House. Another woman, a favorite of the governor’s, was Marguerite Rawalt who also served as Neff’s secretary and went on to graduate from George Washington University law school, and later became president of the National Women Lawyers Association, and was one of the earliest woman members of the American Bar Association.


30Debbie Mauldin Cottrell, " ALL-WOMAN SUPREME COURT," Handbook of Texas Online, accessed February 26, 2011, http://www.tshaonline.org /handbook/online/articles/jpa01 (Cottrell states that Neff “had named women to serve on numerous state boards and was also the first Texas governor to appoint a woman as his private secretary.” Neff had three private secretaries as governor. Stanford’s immediate predecessor was R.B. Walthall; Neff to Edith Metcalfe, January 9, 1925, PNP; "NEAL, MARGIE ELIZABETH," Handbook of Texas Online accessed February 06, 2011 http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fne02; Brown, Hood, Bonnet, Little Brown Jug, 156; “Women Entering on Careers Find Selves Welcomed as Men, Washington Attorney Asserts” DMN, February 20, 1937; “American Bar Seats Texas Woman Lawyer,” DMN, April 8, 1943.
Pat M. Neff left the governor’s office at noon on January 20, 1925. He had led the state through turbulent times filled with racial, social, political, and labor unrest. Much of this unrest was the result of resistance to change or modernity. Neff himself was the product of that; his election had signaled the rise of the Progressive wing of the Texas Democratic Party to new prominence. Texas politics had changed and conservatives could no longer count on being the only voice in it that mattered. As a Southern Progressive, Neff’s record is mixed. He had some failures such as revising Texas’ tax code and Constitution. On the other hand, his efforts to preserve public lands in the form of the state park system, and his efforts to conserve water resources, were great successes. The latter of these insured the continued growth and economic development of the state. True to his Southern Progressive philosophy, former Governor Neff played an active role in preserving and building those assets—and building the future of Texas. Neff had the misfortune of leading the state when it bordered on, and sometimes stepped over the edge of, chaos. His inability to handle events, without resorting to heavy-handedness, or his unwillingness to counter the forces of chaos, negatively effected his historical position. Neff’s would-be campaign for president in 1924 however, reflected the growing importance of Texas in national politics. For the most part, Neff’s days in politics were waning—but what remained was very eventful.
These four gladsome years of service have widened my vision, strengthened my purpose, humbled my spirit, mellowed my heart, enriched my life, and ennobled my soul; and there shall not be one shadow of regret to darken the smiling skies that bend above me as I go out of your Capitol today a private citizen….as I have worked and wrought to make Texas a better place in which to live.

--Pat M. Neff

When Neff left office in January of 1925, the period that historians later called the “Progressive Era” had ended. Nevertheless, like many other Southern Progressives, he continued to pursue a Progressive agenda. As a private citizen, Neff was no longer constrained by his fellow politicians or the forces of “lawlessness.” He continued in service to society as either a public official or educator for nearly all of the remainder of his life. Shortly after leaving office, the former governor served as a member of the United States Railroad Board of Mediation until 1929 after which he served on the Texas Railroad Commission before finally assuming the presidency of Baylor University in 1932 where he spent the rest of his working life. In the ensuing years, Neff had several pet projects that were very much in keeping with the Progressive spirit. He continued work begun as governor to conserve water resources for the purposes of flood control and economic development and he played a major role in building the state park system. Neff had also been a long-time supporter of the idea of a Texas centennial celebration and served as President of the Texas Centennial Commission the lasting legacy of which is the southwestern art deco exposition buildings of Dallas’ Fair Park. Thus, through endeavors like public service, building of public areas, water conservation, and economic
development, Neff pursued Progressive policies and ideals long past the glory days of the movement.

After leaving office, Neff returned home to Waco where he resumed his private law practice. The former governor occasionally made speeches on behalf of prohibition enforcement but otherwise avoided conspicuous politicking. In February 1927, President Calvin Coolidge nominated Neff to the United States Railroad Board of Mediation to fill a vacancy caused by a resignation. The board’s primary responsibility was mediating disputes between railroad unions and railroad companies. Of course, the President’s nomination of Neff was no doubt greatly influenced by his handling of the Railroad Shopmen’s Strike as governor, and labor opposed the appointment for the same reason. Nevertheless, Neff’s appointment was confirmed with the help of Texas’ Senator Earle Mayfield who served on the Interstate Commerce Committee. Neff served for two years before the nomination needed renewal. In early December of 1928, in the closing months of his administration, Coolidge once again nominated Neff for the position. But, by this time his re-nomination was mired in electoral politics in addition to the opposition of organized labor.¹

Not only was 1928 a presidential election year, it was also the year Senator Mayfield was to stand for re-election—both affected Neff’s re-nomination. The circumstances of Mayfield’s election in 1922 were dubious at best considering his opponent was former Governor Jim Ferguson who was supposed to be ineligible for office following his impeachment. The fact that Mayfield had Ku Klux Klan connections only added to the controversy. Texas voters had no good choice of candidates to send to Washington. Once Mayfield got there, congressional leaders were not sure they wanted him. The Senate investigated Mayfield’s election for two

¹“Confirming of Neff for Rail Board Fought,” *DMN* December 31, 1928; Earle Mayfield to Neff, Telegram, February 9, 1927, PNP; “Renominates Neff,” *DMN* December 7, 1928.
years before finally seating him. Thus, the Senator already faced serious challenges in his re-
election bid. Mayfield announced his candidacy on April 16, 1928 and vowed to “stand by the
record I have made.” He outlined a program of eradication of agricultural pests, aiding farmers,
and opposing federal interference in state affairs among other issues. Mayfield faced five other
candidates including Minnie Fisher Cunningham and six-term Congressman Thomas T.
Connally who represented Waco. It was Connally’s candidacy that posed the most challenge for
both Mayfield and Neff. Connally was popular with voters and was an effective campaigner; he
had also been friends with Neff for years. Neff was in a difficult position whereby Mayfield
expected Neff’s support in his re-election bid in reciprocity for the Senator’s support of Neff’s
confirmation in the Interstate Commerce Committee. This happenstance, or political reality, was
immediately in conflict with Neff’s and Connally’s friendship. Someone was sure to lose.2

Being the challenger, Connally immediately targeted Mayfield and his record. In a
campaign speech in McKinney, Connally stated, “There are but two issues in the senatorial
campaign….First is the corruption of the Republican Party. We need more Democrats in the
Senate. The second issue is the use of large sums of money contributed to campaign funds by
those seeking to secure favors for special interests.” Connally then accused Mayfield of being in
the pocket of big business, especially railroads and oil companies. Alluding to Mayfield’s
running on the “record,” Connally went on to say, “When a Congressman tells you that he is
about the only one in Washington of any consequence, you can put him down as a false alarm.”
Connally ended the speech by referring to his own record, saying, “Since I have been in
Congress for twelve years, I have fought for the best interests of my people….I will give your

interests the same attention when you promote me to the Senate.” The previous day in Sulphur Springs, Connally brought up the important issue of party loyalty. The Congressman stated, “When I opened my campaign, I promised I would support the nominees of the party….I reassert to you that I will support Governor Smith…for the presidency.” At the time, Democrats voting in the primary had to pledge to support the nominee of the party, whoever they were, in the fall election. This was an important issue in the 1928 presidential elections because many southerners, and Texans, could not support Smith who was urban, “wet,” and Catholic. Because of this, Smith’s opponent, Republican Herbert Hoover enjoyed surprising support in Texas. Democrats voting in the general election theoretically could only vote for Hoover if they had not voted in the primary—or if they broke the pledge.3

Those Texas Democrats who did vote generally split their choice of Senate candidates. Initial reports showed Mayfield ahead with 93,878 votes to Connally’s 90,217, but neither candidate had a plurality so the race went to a run-off. The two remaining candidates began planning for the campaign and soon returned to the stump. On August 7th in Brownwood, Mayfield directly addressed what was probably the most controversial aspect of his candidacy if not his entire political career. Here Mayfield publicly acknowledged that he had once been a member of the Ku Klux Klan but added that he was no longer a member of the organization and that it had no role in his current campaign. The fact that the Senator chose to address such a sensitive topic at what was the climax of the campaign says much about the state of his candidacy. Moreover, Mayfield’s revelation likely offended many prospective voters, who probably also doubted his word about dropping his Klan membership. A few weeks later, Texans returned to the polls. Initial returns indicated that Connally had defeated Mayfield by a

margin of some 60,000 votes. During the campaign, Neff had remained conspicuously quiet
supporting neither candidate. Thus, Connally became the presumptive new Senator from Texas;
Mayfield’s days in Washington were numbered and so were Neff’s. 4

As the general election approached, political interests turned to the presidential race.
Many Texans were inclined to vote for Hoover despite the primary pledge. Organizations such
as Democrats for Hoover and the Anti-Al Smith Democrats of Texas actively worked against
Smith and for Hoover. As a Democrat, and a Republican appointee, this situation put Neff in an
uncomfortable position. As early as September, Neff was approached by the Anti-Al Smith
Democrats to speak against the Democratic nominee. About a month before the election, Neff
received a “confidential” letter from Lula Tubb of Dallas. Tubb wrote, “I’ve just been talking to
a bunch of very influential men.” The group included Alvin Moody, President of the Anti-Al
Smith Democrats of Texas, and J.B. Cranfill, on whose stationary the letter was written. Tubb
continued, “I’m delegated to ask you if you’d consider coming to Dallas to speak for Hoover
over the radio before the election.” She assured Neff what a “wonderful thing it will mean for
you.” Tubb added, “I do hope you will see your way clear to accept this invitation….if your
answer to this is unfavorable, it will be dropped.” Tubb closed with a request for Neff to answer
by mail. There is no record of a reply and Neff never made the speech. 5

Hoover, of course, won the election. More importantly, Hoover defeated Smith in Texas
by a margin of 367,036 to 341,031 and became the first Republican presidential candidate to win
in the state since Reconstruction. Neff had campaigned for neither candidate. Shortly after the

4“Mayfield and Connally Run Neck and Neck for Senate,” DMN, July 29, 1928; “Candidates to Open
Campaign,” DMN, August 4, 1928; “Mayfield Gets Much Applause at Brownwood,” DMN, August 8, 1928;
Connally Nominated for Senate over Mayfield DMN August 26, 1928.

5Lula Tubb to Neff, October 10, 1928, PNP; R.B. Humphrey to Neff, Letter, September 25, 1928, PNP;
election, Tubb again wrote Neff. She began congenially, “Next time you are in Dallas be sure to come by the Southland Hotel” at the offices of the Anti-Al Smith Democrats. She continued, “A lot of prominent men are in the office every day. Most of them seem to think you were an enemy of Hoover during this campaign and I might be able to help you.” Tubb lamented, “I resent the idea that you are not to be depended on in a moral issue and that you care nothing for friends.” She closed succinctly with, “Have a lot of things to talk over with you.” Tubb was close enough to Neff to address him as “Pat” and the insinuation that he was unreliable, especially on any “moral issue,” was too much for Neff. He replied, “I am always glad to hear about you….and shall certainly…drop by your office and talk politics.” Neff then addressed Tubb’s friends’ expression of “disappointment” that he had not “linked up in an active aggressive way…in the late political campaign.” Neff explained his actions noting, “So far as political matters are concerned. I have not…made any statement, given out any interview, made any speech, or written any article since I left Austin nearly four years ago.” Neff further explained that this was the political course he had taken. The former governor had clearly decided to take the political “high road” by which politics seldom travels—especially in Texas. It would not be the last time Neff had to explain this course.6

About the same time as Neff and Tubb corresponded, President Coolidge renewed Neff’s nomination to the Railroad Board of Mediation. Less than a week later, the nomination was already in trouble. Initial reports indicated that outgoing Senator Mayfield had requested that the committee report be held until after the holidays. Furthermore, railroad unions announced they also opposed the nomination and specifically cited Neff’s actions during the Railroad Shopmen’s Strike as a reason. Senator-elect Connally, apparently bearing no ill will toward Neff for not

campaigning for him, personally checked into the matter. Connally reported that Mayfield had not cited a specific reason for opposing the nomination but had only requested that it be delayed until his arrival in Washington. The request was granted by the committee chairman as a matter of senatorial courtesy. Connally further reported that he would urge Senator Morris Sheppard to “look out” for Neff’s interests. Meanwhile, Congressman John Nance Garner also checked into the matter and reported that sources told him they thought Neff would be confirmed after the holidays. Neff’s friends in Austin also began to circle the political wagons. R.B. Walthall who had advised Neff as governor and who was chairman of the State Board of Control, sent a telegram asking, “Can any of us do anything for you?”

Neff’s friends soon began a program to inundate Mayfield’s offices with letters and telegrams in support of his nomination. Walthall reported to Neff the names of a number of politicos he had contacted to pressure Mayfield. After some delay, Neff replied to Walthall that Mayfield “received many letters, but was still persistent in urging personal objections to my confirmation.” He then conceded, “I have abandoned any hope of anybody in any way of influencing him to desist from this operation.” Neff then stated that he had decided to pursue “a new line of operation.” He suggested that friends in Austin should wire committee members directly in support of Neff. Leaving no stone unturned, Neff also contacted Senator Mayfield. On Christmas morning, Neff received Mayfield’s reply by telegram. The senator wrote, “If you desire a conference with me concerning confirmation of your appointment…I think it only frank to advise you that I have reached a definite conclusion to oppose same….A conference would result in no change of my attitude.” This did not dissuade Neff. A few hours later, Neff sent an

---

over-night telegram to Senator Sheppard asking advice and noting he wanted to “leave nothing undone.”

To this end, Neff contacted several prominent Texans to plead his case. Former Governor William Hobby answered Neff’s appeal with, “I telegrammed Mayfield…urging him to withdraw objections. I think he is making a big mistake.” Neff also contacted Amon Carter, publisher of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Carter offered to do “anything I can to assist you” but noted that since his paper had “strenuously opposed” Mayfield in the election, it was highly likely that any effort would be “harmful rather than helpful.” Neff later thanked Carter for his efforts and explained, “It is not difficult under the rules of the Senate for even one Senator to block confirmation proceedings during the last weeks.” Neff even went so far as to appeal to R.B. Creager, leader of the Texas Republican Party. Creager replied, “[I] would very much like to oblige you but do not feel it preferable for me to make an endorsement for democratic place upon one of these bipartisan Commissions without the approval of pro-Hoover democratic organization of Texas. A few days later, Cullen Thomas sent his New Years greeting to Neff and commented on his predicament. Thomas asked, “If the worst came to worst, would you not be reappointed by Hoover? And then with Connally in, wouldn’t you be alright?” This was a good question. It seemed that Mayfield could only delay the nomination until the next session, at which time President Hoover could re-nominate Neff.

Since Mayfield’s acquiescence was out of the question, Hoover became the key to Neff’s maintaining his position. Neff had a friendly relationship with Hoover and the two occasionally

---

8R.B. Walthall to Neff, December 4, 1928, PNP; Mayfield to Neff, December 25, 1928; Neff to Sheppard, December 26, 1928.

9Hobby to Neff, January 9, 1929, PNP; Amon Carter to Neff, January 7, 1929, PNP; Neff to Amon Carter, February 25, 1929, PNP; R.B. Creager to Neff, December 29, 1928, PNP; Cullen Thomas to Neff, January 2, 1929, PNP.
communicated in their respective capacities as a member of the railroad board of mediation and commerce secretary. Neff dutifully congratulated Hoover on both his nomination for the presidency as well as his election. Both of these Hoover politely acknowledged. On January 12, 1929, Neff had a personal meeting with Hoover but the meeting was apparently inconclusive. At this point, Neff used an unusual connection his old friend and former student from his school teaching days in Arkansas, Harvey Couch. By this time, Couch was president of Arkansas Power and Light Company and was on good terms with Hoover. Couch, who had been invited by the president-elect to attend the inaugural, promised to “talk to Mr. Hoover directly” if given the opportunity. Couch did not meet with the new president but instead wrote to him noting he was “anxious” that Neff be reappointed. So, with personal appeals made to the new president, Neff’s future lay in Hoover’s hands.10

Couch got one last chance with Hoover about a month later and subsequently reported the proceedings of the meeting to Neff. He wrote, “I had a visit with the president for about thirty minutes and, of course, your matter was discussed.” Couch added, “He brought it up himself and stated he regretted so much he could not make the appointment but he had the matter looked into very carefully and he was very doubtful if you could be confirmed.” Couch consolingly added that the president believed that pushing the nomination would “bring on trouble both for you and himself.” In further consolation, Hoover apparently extended the possibility of another nomination. Couch wrote, “But very confidentially, he stated to me he was going to have another position in a reasonably short time…and he was going to save this to take care of you.” Neff’s reaction to this news is not recorded, but he had every reason to doubt Hoover’s sincerity. A few days before Couch’s meeting with the president, Hoover had nominated former Texas

---

10Hoover to Neff, June 16, 1928, PNP; Hoover to Neff, November 8, 1928, PNP; Hoover’s Daily Calendar, January 12, 1929, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum, West Branch, Iowa; Couch to Neff, February 26, 1929; Couch to Hoover, March 4, 1929, PNP.
Governor Oscar B. Colquitt to Neff’s seat on the National Railroad Board of Mediation. The Senate confirmed the nomination a few weeks later. During the election campaign, Colquitt had served as the finance chair for the Anti-Al Smith Democrats of Texas. As it turned out, R.B. Creager had recommended Colquitt after rebuffing Neff. He had refused to play politics while holding what amounted to a “spoils” job. Mayfield blocked Neff’s nomination for not supporting him in his re-election bid. Likewise, Hoover refused to re-nominate Neff because he had not supported him. Despite the assurances to Couch, Hoover never nominated Neff for another position and the former governor never held another federal office.11

Neff’s friends, at least, appreciated his adherence to principles and ability to stay above politics. This quality instilled both loyalty and sympathy in trying times. After it became apparent that Hoover would not re-nominate Neff, Cullen Thomas wrote, “I have not known whether to congratulate or console you. Anyway, this position was not necessary to your bed or board, or to your prestige, or to your happiness. Anyhow, in or out, on or off, up or down, I am for you.” Luckily, Neff had other friends in high places. In mid October, Governor Dan Moody appointed Neff as Chairman of the Texas Railroad Commission to fill a vacancy left by the death of Clarence E. Gilmore. Ironically, perhaps fittingly, and no doubt deliberately, the nomination came at the expense of none other than former Senator Mayfield. Moody had apparently received “many telegrams and other messages” in support of Mayfield; he ignored those and chose Neff instead. Furthermore, as political observers noted, Mayfield had already served on the railroad Commission. Moody’s decision was obviously a snub in retaliation for Mayfield’s quashing of Neff’s re-nomination to the National Railroad Reconciliation Board.12

11Harvey Couch to Neff, April 22, 1929, PNP; “O. B. Colquitt Put on Board of Mediation,” DMN, April 17, 1929; “O. B. Colquitt is Confirmed for U. S. Post,” DMN. May 11, 1929; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 29.

12Thomas to Neff, April 5, 1929, PNP; “Neff Appointed as Chairman of Railway Board,” DMN, October 15, 1929: “The Shoes Should Fit,” DMN, October 16, 1929.
As Neff’s career entered a new phase, observers noted the increasing responsibilities of the Railroad Commission as well as the challenges it and its new chairman faced. One of the biggest challenges the Commission faced was over-production resulting from the East Texas oil boom, wildcatting, and the deepening Great Depression. Increasing production meant decreasing prices in a market already depressed by a faltering national economy. Though the Texas economy was stronger than most, it grew weaker throughout 1930 and 1931. State officials knew that it was imperative to get a grip on the over-production problem. By 1929, the Texas legislature had already begun to give the Railroad Commission power to limit production to keep up market prices. Another related issue was that of “waste” oil that oilmen allowed to pool on the ground near the well sites and excess gas that they burned off. The problem of waste oil and gas was two-fold, the conservation of finite natural resource as well as the pollution of air and water resources. Furthermore, though the Commission had legal authority to limit over-production and waste, not everyone agreed that it should have that authority. Neff was not one of those people, and as chairman, he became a major proponent of limiting oil production, or proration as it was called.13

On August 8, 1930, Chairman Neff announced a plan to limit Texas oil production by 75,000 barrels per day. The plan affected oil fields all over the state and immediately drew objections from several major producers. Several critics of the plan asserted that the law enabling the Commission to limit production was unconstitutional. Despite the objections, Neff felt so strongly about the plan that he was willing to proceed with its implementation and let the courts rule on legalities later. A few months later, in a meeting between Commissioners and oilmen, Neff promised the Railroad Commission would “come to grips” with those producers

---

that flouted its authority. For good measure, Neff pointed to the presence at the meeting of Texas Attorney General R.M. Tilley to reinforce the notion that the new limits, and the law, would be enforced. Meanwhile, Neff and the Commission also sought to limit the waste of gas in Texas oil fields. According to one source, since the discovery of oil in Texas in 1901, enough “waste” gas had been burned off to supply the state with fuel for fifty years. In one field alone, oil men wasted 150,000,000 cubic feet of gas per day. Chairman Neff was “emphatic” that proration orders be carried out and that gas resources are conserved. Once again, he committed the Railroad Commission to enforcement of proration and conservation unless the courts ruled otherwise.14

Attorneys for the Continental Oil Company, owners of the Big Lake field that was accused of excessive gas burn-off, asserted that waste was “unavoidable.” Furthermore, representatives of Continental added that oil, gas, and timber resources at Big Lake had “dissipated” because “there is no law to prevent it.” This was met by a chorus of “Yes, there is!” directly referring to the new powers of the Railroad Commission. Then attorneys made the mistake of commenting that if Big Lake were closed to save gas, many others would also have to be closed. To this Neff replied, “Well I am in favor of doing it.” At this point, Neff said with a force that Teddy Roosevelt would have appreciated, “the time has come to stop all this waste and I am in favor of closing this field and every other field if it is necessary, to end such a willful waste of a great and valuable resource.” Neff’s position on proration of oil and waste gas was clearly influenced by two factors, his training as an attorney and his Progressive beliefs in the conservation of natural resources. Neff’s training as a lawyer was highly influential in his decision to lead the Texas Railroad Commission to press forward with proration and allow the

14“Plan Attempt to Cut Texas Output of Oil,” DMN, August 9, 1930; “Proration Again,” DMN, August 12, 1930; “Oil Proration Order Broken, Board is Told,” DMN, October 23, 1930; “Wasting of Gas Must End, Says Railway Board,” DMN, October 24, 1930.
courts to uphold its power. His beliefs as a Progressive, in the ideals of conservation of natural resources, were clearly influencing his position on “waste” gas. Moreover, Neff’s actions seem more in line with national Progressives favoring state protection of natural resources over private capital and economic development, as one would expect of a southern Progressive.\(^\text{15}\)

As the proration issue heated up, signs of conflict between Commission members began to appear. On November 14, Commissioner C.V. Terrell issued a provisional extension for Continental to come into compliance with conservation orders. Oil company attorneys cited technical issues related to controlling gas pressure on the wells as the reason for the extension. Apparently, high-pressure gas from the well was forcing oil out as well, thus resulting in waste of both resources. Terrell’s announcement, though “provisional,” came without consulting with the other two Commission members, Lon Smith and Neff. When Neff learned of the extension, he immediately protested the move with a letter to Terrell. Despite the “provisional” nature of the extension, Neff noted that he could not give his consent because of the daily wastage of 150,000,000 cubic feet of gas being “enough to furnish all of the families of Texas with domestic gas for a year.” Neff submitted his objections to Terrell in writing in order to be on record. The deadline for compliance came and went amid confusion and obstruction. Meanwhile, Neff consulted with officials of the Federal Trade Commission in drafting a new proration order designed to withstand legal scrutiny. On November 25, the Texas Railroad Commission issued a new order to cut daily production to 680,238 barrels for ninety days. The new proration order covered major fields throughout the state including East and West Texas, the Panhandle, South Texas, and the Gulf.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{15}\)“Wasting of Gas Must End, Says Railway Board,” *DMN*, October 24, 1930.

\(^{16}\)“Time Extended on Oil Saving,” *DMN*, November 15, 1930; “Neff Protests Oil Extension,” *DMN*, November 18, 1930; “New Proration Order Issued by Rail Board,” *DMN*, October 26, 1930.
Texas voters elected Neff to the Texas Railroad Commission in his own right in November 1930 after he completed the remainder of the term Governor Sterling had appointed him to fill. After the election, Terrell became chair of the Commission, and Neff just a member. Traditionally, the position of chairman had fallen to the most senior member; upon Neff’s appointment, Terrell and Smith allowed the chair to go to the former governor out of respect. After Neff’s election, the Commission reverted to its old pattern presumably by mutual agreement. Nevertheless, personality conflicts and differing management styles continued to plague the relationship of Commission members, especially Neff and Terrell. At the heart of the disagreement was Terrell’s tendency to promulgate decisions without all members of the Commission being present. Neff believed that Commission members should be allowed input even though a simple two out of three vote was all that was necessary for any decision of the Texas Railroad Commission. In July 1931, Terrell and Smith named Laten Stanberry as head of the Commission’s Gas Utilities Division without Neff’s consultation. Neff complained to C.F. Petet, the Commission’s secretary, “I am one of three duly elected members…charged with the joint responsibility of naming those who are to work…in the Commission.” Neff added that such actions were “not conducive to the efficient work of the Commission, nor in the best interest of the state.” Despite Neff’s protest, Stanberry stayed on and disputes over personnel matters continued.17

Differences over the conservation of Texas’ oil and gas resources were also a source of friction between members of the Commission. At about the same time Neff wrote to Petet, he testified before a legislative committee in Austin. The former governor charged that the failure of oil and gas conservation laws in the state were the result of a “lax and indifferent railroad

17Neff Files for Office,” DMN, May 25, 1930; “Terrell is Named Rail Board Head to Succeed Neff,” DMN January 29, 1931; Neff to C.F. Petet, July 27, 1931, PNP.
Commission.” When asked the reason for this “lax” behavior, Commissioner Neff replied, “Physical inactivity, mental inertness, overpowering desire to work along the line of least resistance.” Neff conceded the possible necessity of new statutes but added that “vast improvements could be brought about by firm enforcement of measures already enacted.” Directly addressing both the issues of wastage and proration, Neff stated, “We’ve just dilly-dallied around and tried to figure out how much [oil and gas] can be sold, and then issued allowable orders. That isn’t proration at all; it isn’t conservation in any sense of the word.”

Neff’s testimony was telling on several levels. Many policy makers recognized the need to cut oil and gas production to boost prices; in the early days of the Great Depression, over production of oil was as much a threat to the state’s economy as the over production of cotton had been for years. Furthermore, policy makers like Terrell and Smith were often reluctant to place limits on businessmen in a fragile economic climate. Neff saw beyond the immediate problem. Oil and gas production needed to be controlled not only to preserve its price in the marketplace, but also to conserve valuable resources. The situation seemed to call for regulatory intervention by government under the banner of Southern/Business Progressivism but this found resistance by conservative businessmen.18

Neff’s comments about his fellow Commissioners’ work habits cannot have been well received. After all, “physical inactivity” and “mental inertness” is easily translated into “fat, lazy, and stupid.” The episode likely contributed to a further decline of the Commissioners’ relationship. In fact, a few days later, state senators who had grown weary of the bickering, considered a resolution asking the three Commissioners to “work harmoniously or resign” but tabled the motion. By October, the old disagreements about hiring practices returned. Upon

---

18“Railway Board Lax, Pat Neff Informs House,” DMN, July 26, 1931.
reviewing payroll reports, Neff discovered that Terrell and Smith had hired a number of employees without his knowledge. These included a division director and assistant director, an insurance clerk, clerk, and a stenographer. The action elicited a direct response in the form of a formal letter of complaint from Neff to Terrell. Neff wrote pointedly, “The Railroad Commission is composed, under the Constitution, of three members, each charged with the same duties….The Commission is supposed to do its work jointly as a body of three. The selection of individual employees, passing on the character and efficiency of each, is one of the most important duties.” The letter did nothing to improve the situation and probably only served to antagonize Terrell.19

By May 1932, relations between the Railroad Commissioners were near the breaking point when Neff yet again challenged his associates. Terrell and Smith made a trip to East Texas to investigate illegal oil production—without Neff. When Neff found out about it, he wired Terrell and Smith in Tyler and suggested that in addition to the matter at hand, the two should also investigate reports that a local attorney was guaranteeing that he could obtain for anyone a drilling permit from the Commission for the fee of one hundred dollars. Neff also suggested the two look into reports that Railroad Commission personnel were drinking and driving state vehicles while on the job. Then, for good measure, Neff released the text of the message to the press. Terrell apparently responded in kind by saying that Neff was nothing more than a “critic” of the Commission and was not doing his share of the work. In uncharacteristically venomous words, Neff responded, “Why did it rouse your ire for me to make the suggestion that during your ‘thorough investigation’ you make inquiry as to the sobriety of our employees? Instead of spending ‘the summer’ in this sweeping investigation, you spent less than a day and quietly

---

19“Work Harmoniously or Resign, Senate Move Tells Rail Board,” DMN, August 1, 1931; Neff to Terrell, October 1, 1931, PNP.
folded your tent, gave out your self laudatory interview, and came home.” Neff added, “You are correct in your statement that I have been a critic. Why not? My criticisms have been constructive….I am not a ‘yes’ member of the Commission.” Neff then enumerated a thirteen-point list of what he thought were valid criticisms. The two men were clearly “done,” their working relationship beyond repair.²⁰

A few weeks later, Neff formally resigned his seat on the Texas Railroad Commission. Governor Sterling accepted the resignation effective June 4, 1932. This drew a close to Neff’s life in elected public service. However, Neff continued to serve in a new capacity as president of Baylor University. There had been talk of Neff succeeding to the position since the death of S. Palmer Brooks in May of 1931. Neff had served on the university’s board of trustees for twenty years, including a stint as chairman. He was offered the presidency of the University in February but did not immediately accept the position citing the need for reflection. There was also the matter of his remaining term on the Railroad Commission but his falling out with Terrell negated this. Neff accepted the position in March but did not begin his tenure until June 6 thus becoming the first non-educator ever to lead the university. Neff’s career moved from the purely secular to that of an educator and administrator of a religious institution of learning. Nonetheless, this by no means ended his secular interests or services thereto.²¹

Neff continued involvement in several Progressive projects that he had worked on since his days in the Governor’s Mansion. The one for which he is perhaps best remembered is his building the Texas state park system. Neff proposed establishment of the park system to the 38th

²⁰“Pat Neff Wants More Probing in East Texas Field,” DMN, May 4, 1932; Neff to Terrell, May 7, 1932, PNP.

²¹Governor Ross Sterling to Neff, May 25, 1932, PNP; “Dr. S. P. Brooks, Head of Baylor, Dies of Cancer,” DMN, May 14, 1931; “Baylor Board Selects Neff as President,” DMN, February 24, 1932; “Baylor Presidency Accepted by Neff, but at Later Date,” DMN, March 20, 1932; “Neff Will Assume Duties as Baylor President Monday,” DMN, June 4, 1932.
Legislature during his second term as governor. The governor also suggested a low budget approach to getting the system started in which park board members would serve without compensation and would solicit donations of lands for parks. When the legislation establishing the park system passed, Neff himself donated the first tract of park land from his mother’s estate near Waco. Mother Neff State Park opened on December 12, 1924. After leaving office, Neff himself served on the park board for several years and helped secure thousands of acres of land for new state parks. The former governor worked closely with D.E. Colp, Chairman of the Texas State Parks Board in land acquisition, long-term planning, and coordination with other government agencies in the name of growing Texas parks. The two men corresponded frequently about perspective donors, and their donations, as well as practical concerns such as the construction of roads for public access and facilities such as restrooms, picnic areas, lodges, and any other such detail.22

By 1928, the Texas State Park Board had made considerable progress in acquiring new lands. In July, the board entered negotiations with the cities of Bandera, Leaky, and Utopia for over 6,000 acres of land. Colp hoped to secure highway department cooperation in building roads to connect the three main sites noting this would “serve every purpose of a hundred thousand acre park.” When completed, the deal provided a series of state parks, forests, and game preserves located in the rolling hill country just northwest of San Antonio all connected by scenic roadways. In late August, the Park Board received a major donation. J. Humphries of Marfa donated a 23,109 acre ranch located near Presidio that became part of what is now the Big Bend Ranch State Park. That park, adjacent to Big Bend National Park, is now the largest park in the system and is comprised of nearly 300,000 acres. A few months later, Colp wrote Neff,

22“Neff Urges State Sytem of Parks,” DMN, May 2, 1923; “Mother Neff Park Given to Citizens, DMN, December 12, 1924.
“Our park program seems to be in good shape.” He mentioned that he had talked to Governor Dan Moody about additional appropriation in the upcoming session of the legislature. Moody was amenable, and even suggested waiting until the special session he intended to call. The prospect of greater state support was likely welcomed as the Great Depression insinuated its way into Texas.23

One of the other important responsibilities of the Texas State Park Board was promotion of the parks. Nearly any opportunity was appreciated but some were no doubt better than others. In January of 1932, Colp wrote Neff regarding a letter of enquiry he had received from Robert W. Ripley, of “Ripley’s Believe it or Not” fame. Ripley had heard that Texas had a “public kissing park” known as the Kirby Kissing Park located near Silsbee. Ripley wanted a photo of the park for use in his syndicated newspaper feature. Colp wrote Neff, “Governor, what shall we do? Send him Kirby’s picture? We can’t let this good publicity go to waist [sic]. Will Mr. Kirby stand for a good joke?” The joke was more likely on Neff who, as a well-known proponent of good morals, was being asked to promote a “make-out” spot. The incident also put Neff and the Park Board in the strange position of possibly having to refuse free publicity. As it turned out, unfortunate circumstance allowed Neff to dodge the issue. Neff replied, “My information is that Mr. Kirby has since sold the tract of land he had promised to donate for park purposes.” John Kirby, like many at the time, was a victim of the Depression. Neff stated Kirby was “absolutely on the rocks financially” and that under the circumstances, he would “not have the courage” to approach him. Neff told Colp to regard the donation as one of the “might have beens.”

statement illustrates the slow, difficult process of building the park system through donations of land—especially in economic hard times.24

In another episode, Neff sought to combine promotion of the parks with some political fence mending. In April of 1937, Neff struck upon the idea of gathering all of the state’s former governors at Mother Neff State Park on Mother’s Day for the occasion of the park’s grand reopening following extensive improvements by the Civilian Conservation Corps. In a letter to former Governor Jim Ferguson, Neff wrote, “If I remember correctly, the former governors of Texas have not for the past fifteen years…assembled anywhere at the same time.” Neff then appealed in a spirit of reconciliation, “It seems to me there should be a common tie that binds together all of those who have served as governor, and this without regards to political views, previous campaigns, political alignment, or ‘previous condition of servitude.’ We should meet now and then on a common platform.” The odds of bringing together old political enemies like Jim Ferguson, Dan Moody, and Bill Hobby were nearly incalculable. As one reads Neff’s orchestrations with Ferguson, the Book of Matthew can practically be heard echoing in his mind, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.” Neff wrote all of the former governors, as well as Governor James Allred, and patiently, perhaps even naively, awaited a reply.25

A few days later, Neff received a reply from Ferguson. He wrote, “My wife [former Governor Miriam Ferguson] joins me in stating that while we appreciate the high motives which have prompted you in this idea…and while we both hold you in high esteem, we do not believe that such a meeting would promote harmony, and very likely would result in a lack of congeniality.” “Harmony and “congeniality” were likely high on Neff’s list of preferences for

24 D.E. Colp to Neff, January 23, 1932, PNP; Neff to D.E. Colp, February 9, 1932.
25 Neff to James E. Ferguson, April 4, 1937, PNP.
this event. Ferguson’s sincerity and thoughtfulness here is commendable as he declined Neff’s invitation. Former Governor Hobby, who had replaced Jim Ferguson, wrote that he was in “accord” with Neff’s idea and added that he and his wife Oveta would attend. Former Governor Moody replied the same day as Hobby. Moody wrote, “I sincerely appreciate the invitation….It would however, be unfair to you for me to accept if all the former governors of this state are to be present.” Moody added, “There is one with whom I have nothing to do and I am pleased that he has nothing to do with me….I am opposed to the things he typifies…and avoid any and all contacts with him.” Moody and Ferguson were longtime opponents dating to their contest for the democratic gubernatorial nomination in 1926 which Moody won. Neff’s meeting of the governors never materialized. Many appreciated and admired his high mindedness but few were able to emulate it—especially went it came to politics. Neff held to his personal principles and Progressive ideals and believed firmly in fairness. In succeeding years, these qualities caused state Democratic leaders to call upon Neff to be the peacemaker in times of discord.26

In addition to parks, another Progressive project that drew Neff’s long-term involvement was water conservation and development. Here, Governor Neff’s contributions have gone largely unnoticed though they were crucial to the long-term growth and economic development of Texas. Again, Neff’s involvement dated to his days as governor when he commissioned a topographic and hydrographic survey of the state in 1923. The result was an extensive aerial photographic survey of the state conducted in cooperation with the United States Geological Survey Bureau. Among other things, the survey identified possible locations for future dams and lakes. After leaving office, Neff’s interest in water resources continued and he became president of the Texas Watersheds Association (TWA) in 1938. This association’s goals were to facilitate

26James E. Ferguson to Neff, April 9, 1937, PNP; Dan Moody to Neff, April 18, 1937.
government cooperation at all levels in order to “promote the conservation, control, protection, and utilization of the water resources, both surface and underground, of the State of Texas.” The association also sought to create public interest in water issues and to encourage legislation to protect and conserve the precious commodity. The TWA issued Neff Membership Card #1 in order to recognize his place as “The father of the conservation movement in Texas.”27

After Neff’s survey of Texas water resources began, the natural course of action was to organize and plan to make use of the findings. The 39th Texas legislature which began its work immediately after Neff left office in 1925, did just that by passing extensive legislation to protect, preserve, and develop water resources. The most important piece of legislation passed authorized the formation of Water Control and Improvement Districts. These were also authorized to issue bonds, levy taxes, acquire property, and most importantly, to make improvements such as the construction of dams. In effect, the legislation authorized the formation of organizations to construct dams in a state having only one natural lake (Caddo) itself located on the Louisiana state line. Texas needed lakes within its vast borders for both population growth and economic development. It is important to note that, by 1925, Texas had built just twelve dams and reservoirs. In the next few years, the state was able to build more dams, but legal issues and the Depression hampered the activities of water control districts. Between 1925 and 1939, only eighteen additional dams were constructed.28

27“Extracts from the By-laws of the Texas Watersheds Association,” PNP; R.O. Whiteaker to Neff, January 16 1939, PNP.
A primary concern of the Texas Watershed’s Association was the passage of legislation to facilitate water conservation and development. This included both the passage of new legislation as well as improving upon that already in place. During the regular session of the legislature in 1939, the organization focused efforts on several tax remission bills under consideration. In March, R.O. Whiteaker, manager of the TWA, wrote Neff that, the passage of such legislation “will mean early development of the various projects contemplated by the eleven river districts concerned.” At the same time, the watersheds association sought to head off legislation that would consolidate the State Board of Water Engineers and the State Reclamation Board with several other state agencies because it would “destroy the usefulness and efficiency of these agencies.” The clear intent of the proposed legislative agenda was to make it easier to fund and build Texas lakes.29

Neff’s involvement was two-fold. First, the former governor and “father” of conservation in Texas was enlisted to use his influence on legislators. Claude V. Birkhead, San Antonio attorney and TWA lobbyist, sent Neff a list of legislators whom he had already approached adding, “I should appreciate it if you will look it over and pick out those you know, regardless of whether they represent your district, and personally communicate with them, calling attention to the importance of this legislation and urging them to support it.” Secondly, the association enlisted Neff’s help in order to gain support from the general public. Neff spoke on the Texas State Network’s radio show, “Current Affairs Forum.” Neff began by noting that the show’s sponsor, the Institute for Public Affairs, had as one of its objectives, “the industrial and economic development of Texas” and that he had been asked to discuss “any question” he thought important to the people of Texas. His chosen topic was “Water: Its Use and Misuse.”

29R.O. Whiteaker to Neff, Letter, March 15, 1939, PNP.
Neff noted, “The waters of Texas have not been by nature, evenly distributed.” The state was prone to flooding in one region, and arid in others. He added, “The conservation and distribution of the flood waters of Texas is today one of our greatest economic problems.” Neff believed that water was being “misused” if allowed to flood lowlands, to otherwise erode soil, or if allowed to runoff in arid areas. Finally, in a flourish of Southern Progressive rhetoric, Neff warned, “A nation robbed of its freedom may regain it; a state divided may reunite; but any country that will not conserve its water for the continuing beneficial use of its people, and preserve its land in the interest of future generations, will be poor forever.”

Texas’ Forty-sixth Legislature passed several important pieces of legislation concerning water resources and Governor Neff and the TWA were at least partially responsible. First, the legislature addressed the inadequacies of the original 1925 law that established water control districts. With the very legitimacy of several districts under question, the legislature passed legislation validating their organization, election of officials, and even all proceedings of boards of directors. More importantly, the legislature validated water control districts’ authority to issue bonds and established penalties for non-payment of taxes and other fees assessed by them. Furthermore, the legislature decreed that such fees left unpaid constituted a lien on the properties assessed on. Finally, the legislature also remitted back to Texas’ counties half of the state property tax for five years to use for a variety of projects including funding water control districts. The move to consolidate the State Board of Water Engineers and the State Reclamation Board with other agencies failed. The net effect of this legislation was that the legality and

---

authority of water control districts was no longer in question and their ability to raise revenue assured.31

After 1939, the construction of new lakes in Texas boomed. During the 1940s, the state built twelve new lakes; in the 1950s, it built thirty-one. During the same period, Texas’ population grew rapidly. In 1930, the state’s population had been 5,824,715; by 1940 the population had grown to 6,414,824. During the ensuing decade, Texas’ population increased by just over twenty percent to 7,711,194. In 1940, forty-five percent of the state’s population lived in cities; by 1950, the figure had grown to sixty-two percent. Cities, of course provided a ready workforce for economic growth—the new lakes provided water for both. Today, Texas has 136 artificial lakes 108 of which were built after 1940. By commissioning the first complete survey of Texas water resources in 1923, and by working diligently for years to develop those resources, Pat Neff can be considered one of the most important figures in bringing an urbanized and industrialized “New South” to Texas.32

Neff kept his eye on Progressive ideals for years after the Progressive Era had ended. Public service was an important component of that and Neff served as governor, national railroad labor mediator, and state railroad Commissioner. Meanwhile, like many southern Progressives, Neff was deeply influenced by his Christian beliefs. Nevertheless, Neff’s belief in secular institutions masked this somewhat during his time in public office but it sometimes showed


through as it did in his messages to the legislature as governor. In the years immediately after leaving the Governor’s Mansion, the “golden rule” of “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” seemed to permeate his career and actions. He genuinely believed that if he abstained from political activity, that others would respect that “course,” as he called it. Neff neglected to take into account the politician’s version of the golden rule, “Do unto others before they do unto you.” Conventional politicians like Mayfield or Hoover, were less likely to allow Neff to be apolitical. They expected Neff to cooperate politically with them in return for their own cooperation. Neff forgot the age-old political idea of “quid pro quo.” As a result, Neff lost his position on the Railroad Board of Mediation. Neff’s subsequent experience on the Texas Railroad Commission was little better, again marred by personality conflicts with less principled politicians. By the time Neff left the Railroad Commission for the presidency of Baylor University, he had grown weary of politicians, if not politics itself.

Pat Neff’s credentials as a Progressive, especially a Southern Progressive, are particularly apparent with respect to conservation. During his life he was referred to as the “father of the conservation movement in Texas.” His efforts to preserve the state’s natural beauty in the form of the state park service parallel similar efforts on a national scale by Progressive President Teddy Roosevelt. Governor Neff went so far as to donate the land for the state’s first park, Mother Neff State Park, during his last term. After he left office, Neff traveled the state viewing parcels of land and using his influence to solicit new donations for other parks. For years, historians and the general public have regarded the state park system as Neff’s most important legacy. In fact, Neff’s work to conserve Texas’ water resources with the construction of lakes has been much more important in the long term. To a Southern Progressive, economic development and construction of infrastructure were paramount to development of the “New
South.” Texas was the first southern state to become more urban and industrial as evidenced by the 1950 census. In the post war years, Texas continued to grow rapidly both demographically and economically. None of this would have been possible without water. For that reason, perhaps the title “father of the New South in Texas” should be added to Neff’s list of accomplishments.
CHAPTER 12

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: SAVING AND BUILDING BAYLOR

From the beginning, civilization, in its march around the world...has recognized its relation to colleges and universities...Education without moral training may be a power for evil, as well as for good. The education that teaches you to trace the shining pathway of the stars, but instructs you not as to duty’s path, is a fraud. The education that trains you to calculate the weight and worth of diamond dust, but tells you nothing of the weight and worth of a man’s good character is a farce. The education that enables you to solve intricate analytical problems, but which throws no light on the great problems of life, is unworthy....

--Pat M. Neff

When Pat Neff became president of Baylor University in June of 1932, the institution, like many others, was floundering in the depths of the Great Depression. Neff was a natural choice for the position. In addition to being a proven administrator, he had the added benefits of being both a graduate of the institution and president of the board of trustees for more than twenty-five years. Neff’s good name, connections, and skills as a promoter were also likely considerations in bringing him to Baylor. In taking the position, he left the burdens of a difficult and tumultuous job as a Texas Railroad Commissioner, but took on the considerable burdens of leading a relatively small private university in a time of declining enrollment, reduced donations, and plummeting endowment funds. As president, Neff sought to keep Baylor open any way he could. Meanwhile, he committed himself and Baylor to providing its students a solid Christian education rooted in strong morals and beliefs. The university and its students needed each other to survive. Neff used Progressive ideals to do that in the form of New Deal programs and with the introduction of modern business practices. As the new president of Baylor University, Pat Neff faced many difficult challenges.¹

¹“Neff Will Assume Duties as Baylor President Monday,” DMN, June 4, 1932; “Pat Neff Favored to
The most pressing issue Neff faced was Baylor’s finances. Years later, he summarized the institution’s financial state at the time of his ascension to the presidency. He wrote, “A careful study of the records definitely shows that Baylor University…has never been out of debt. At times she would borrow from Peter to pay Paul and from Paul to pay Peter, and at times, from other brethren to pay both Peter and Paul, but she has at all times owed money to somebody.”

More tellingly, he added, “The debts of Baylor University reached their highest in September 1932 when her total financial obligation to others aggregated $376,428. For three consecutive months prior to this the university had not paid any of her employees or faculty….She could not borrow money from anyone. The world-wide Depression was at its worst.” Neff’s assessment was slightly exaggerated but the Biblical analogy was quite accurate. In the months preceding the height of Baylor’s financial crisis, the board of trustees borrowed from several banks in order to meet day-to-day expenses. On February 8, 1932, Baylor treasurer J. B. Fisher reported that it “would be necessary to borrow the sum of $13,000 to meet current expenses…the treasurer was authorized to borrow $5,000 from the National City Bank of Waco.” In April, the board borrowed an additional $20,000 from the First Trust and Savings Bank.²

As the Depression deepened, Baylor continued to borrow. In April of 1933, the institution sought a $20,000 loan from Citizens’ National Bank of Waco that was approved, a $5,000 loan from First National Bank of Waco which was also approved, and an additional $10,000 was sought from National City Bank of Waco. About two weeks later, the board again

²President’s Report to the Baptist General Convention of Texas, November 10, 1937, Folder 46, Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees—Waco Executive Committee—Minutes: 1933-1957. Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Baylor University Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes for February 8, 1932, Minutes, General Board of Trustees and Waco Executive Committee, Sept. 26, 1930 through Nov. 28, 1933, (Record Book), Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. 113; Baylor University Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes for April 2, 1932, Minutes, General Board of Trustees and Waco Executive Committee, Sept. 26, 1930 through Nov. 28, 1933, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. 144.
sought a loan from First National Bank of Waco for $20,000. This time, the bank required a “Letter of Guarantee “for the full sum signed by all of the members of the Waco Executive Committee of the Baylor Board of Trustees. Clearly, loans were harder to get and terms were tightening as well. The requirement for executive board members to act as guarantors likely reinforced the perception of Baylor’s increasingly precarious financial situation. Consequently, trustees sought to consolidate Baylor’s outstanding debts and to refinance them. Trustees authorized the executive committee “to arrange to refinance and extend the time for the payment of the indebtedness of Baylor University.” The board eventually authorized issuing of new bonds for $100,000 payable, depending on the series number, on April 1 of the following years: 1936, 1937, 1938, and 1939. This was an important move toward solvency that took years to complete.3

While Neff and the trustees struggled with the university’s debt problem, Neff himself worked to make the institution more efficient. By September of 1932, President Neff reported that he was “making every effort to economize at every place possible, where said economy did not seriously affect the efficiency of the work of the institution.” More importantly, Neff was “substituting student help for all work in connection with the university in regard to the upkeep of the buildings and grounds and such other places wherever such work could done.” Use of student workers served two important purposes—it kept students enrolled who might not otherwise have been able to attend and it provided a low-cost way for Baylor to operate. In many ways, this anticipated several of the New Deal programs that were yet to come in early

---

3Baylor University Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes for April 28, 1933, Minutes, General Board of Trustees and Waco Executive Committee, Sept. 26, 1930 through Nov. 28, 1933, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. 190; Baylor University Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes for May 9, 1933, Minutes, General Board of Trustees and Waco Executive Committee, Sept. 26, 1930 through Nov. 28, 1933, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. 223; Baylor University Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes for April 26, 1933, Minutes, General Board of Trustees and Waco Executive Committee, Sept. 26, 1930 through Nov. 28, 1933, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. 206.
1933 and that Neff and Baylor would later use to fund both its students and the school. Neff also 
advised that he had arranged for the campus hospital and the book store “to be operated without 
any expenses…except payment of tuition for services rendered.” In the President’s Report for 
1933, Neff noted, “As a result of the elimination of teachers, the consolidation of Departments, 
and the reduction of salaries, the annual payroll of the faculty has been reduced by $75,238. This 
reduction…has not caused the elimination of any departments…or the curtailment of any work.” 
He added, “the expenses incidental to the operation of the hospital here at Waco, the bookstore, 
the secretarial help in the Office of the President and the Office of the Cashier as well as most of 
the expenses incidental to the keeping up of the grounds and the cleaning of the buildings [have] 
been eliminated.” The fact that teaching positions were eliminated especially speaks to the 
seriousness of the situation.4

In addition to the financial problems, Baylor also faced issues of declining enrollment, 
which was undoubtedly related to parents’ and students’ own financial difficulties. By 1934, 
Neff began to address these issues in some rather novel ways. In a letter to the board of trustees, 
he wrote, “Last year…we granted to students living in McLennan County half tuition if the 
students were of high standing and…could show they were not financially able to pay full 
tuition…with the understanding that no application would be made by said students to work at 
the university.” Neff continued, “The greatest benefit from this policy was that the university 
was enabled to accommodate a larger number of students who resided outside McLennan Co. but

---

4Baylor University Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes for September 14, 1932, Minutes, General Board of 
Trustees and Waco Executive Committee, Sept. 26, 1930 through Nov. 28, 1933, Texas Collection, Baylor 
University, Waco, Texas. 162; Baylor University Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes for April 25, 1933, President’s 
Report, Minutes, General Board of Trustees and Waco Executive Committee, Sept. 26, 1930 through Nov. 28, 1933, 
Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. 184.
were not able to pay all of their expenses without being given some work.” Thus, the university increased educational opportunity to local students without substantially reducing it for others.⁵

Meanwhile, the university grew more reliant on the use of student workers. In Neff’s report to the Baptist General Convention of Texas for 1934, the beleaguered president wrote, “The university is continuing a policy adopted two years ago to use student help in connection with the university wherever practical….Student are used in all branches and divisions of the university and are paid in tuition rather than money.” He added, “An additional impetus has been given to the student employment plan by the governmental provisions to aid needy students. Baylor is helping 160 students under the Federal Emergency Act which provided employment sufficient for the student to earn an average of $15 per month.” By this time, New Deal programs such as the National Youth Administration (NYA), to which Neff was likely referring, allowed schools like Baylor to further reduce operating expenses by using federal money to pay student workers.⁶

Initially, it was not clear that non-secular, denominational institutions like Baylor could participate in such programs for fear of violating the separation of church and state. In December of 1933, President Thomas W. Brabham of Texas Woman’s College, now Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth, wrote Neff on the subject. Brabham suggested, “It certainly seems to me that in the face of the fact that our denominational schools are carrying one-third…of the educational load of Texas, we could get some relief through the national government.” He added, “I really believe that it would prove a great help to the financial difficulties, under which our institutions are laboring…if we could secure some help.” Brabham

⁵Neff to Baylor Board of Trustees, Letter, April 19, 1934, Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees, General Board, 1934-1955 (Box, V. 15), Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

⁶President’s Report to the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1933-1934, Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees, General Board, 1934-1955 (Box, V. 15), Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.
also enlisted the help of Senator Morris Sheppard to whom he made similar arguments as he had to Neff. In the end, federal officials made the decision to fund college students, and not necessarily universities, which opened the way for Baylor to receive NYA assistance.\(^7\)

Neff and Baylor grabbed a hold of the NYA like the life buoy it was. In a report by the NYA Director for Texas, Lyndon Johnson, the organization was aimed primarily at helping “youth in relief families.” For those youths, the NYA sought to find private employment, provide employment in relief projects, to provide counsel, guidance, and training, and finally, to extend part-time employment to needy college students. According to figures for the fall of the 1934-1935 school year, Baylor was the fourth largest recipient of NYA money, exceeded only by the University of Texas, Texas A&M University, and Texas Technical College. One student and fifteen dollars were all that separated Baylor from Texas Technical College, a state school. Of the state’s religiously based private institutions, Baylor was by far the largest recipient of NYA funds employing ninety-nine student workers with the program. These students worked in nearly every conceivable position including clerical and office, libraries and museums, laboratory assistance, campus improvement and grounds keeping, and health and welfare. The NYA provided a way for needy students to attend college. In turn, it provided a way for universities like Baylor to employ those students in essential jobs while reducing overhead.\(^8\)

---

\(^7\)Thomas W. Brabham to Neff, December 18, 1933, PNP; Brabham to Sheppard, December 19, 1933, PNP; James M. Christianson, "TEXAS WESLEYAN COLLEGE," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed February 08, 2011, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/kbt25; The NYA funding worked similarly to financial aid today. Schools received the money and distributed it to students in the form of tuition, money for books, or work study programs. The issue of denominational schools receiving federal funds was related to the notion of the separation of church and state. Religiously based schools like Baylor ultimately received funding on the basis that it was the student being funded—not the school.

Thus, Neff was a strong believer in the NYA. In the summer of 1937, in the face of possible budget cuts to the agency, Neff made a personal appeal to Harry Hopkins. In addition to being one of President Franklin Roosevelt’s most important advisors, Hopkins also served as the head of the Works Progress Administration, under which authority for the NYA fell. Neff wrote, “This government aid...is productive of excellent results and is a program that should be enlarged rather than curtailed.” Neff reiterated the point noting, “We are so convinced of the great worth of the NYA program that we are reluctant to see a curtailment without making know our sincere faith in soundness of the former provision.” The NYA program continued throughout the duration of the Depression, and Baylor participated in it until it was finally phased out at the beginning of the Second World War.⁹

President Neff worked closely with the NYA and its director in Texas. In late June of 1936, Lyndon Johnson wrote Neff regarding NYA funding for the next school year. Quoting a report from NYA headquarters in Washington, he wrote, “The program of student aid by which needy high school, college, and graduate students have been enabled to earn a portion of the funds needed to keep them in school, will be continued with little change.” The report added, “Approval of this part of our program has been so nearly unanimous, both on the parts of students as well...as college officials...that we felt it unnecessary to make any material alterations.” Neff was pleased by the news and replied cordially, “Thanks for your letter in regard to the NYA work for the coming school year. We are indeed happy to receive this assistance. It is a wonderful help to students and to institutions.” On a more personal note, Neff added, “You are to be congratulated on the splendid work you are doing on behalf of the youth of the country....I plan to be in Austin in a few days, and I am in hopes that I may have a visit

⁹Neff to Harry Hopkins, July 22, 1937, PNP.
with you.” The two men thus developed a warm friendship beyond that of a mere working relationship.10

For Johnson, the political and organizational experience gained at the NYA was a springboard to a political career that culminated in the presidency. In 1937, Johnson entered the United States House of Representatives for Texas’ 10th congressional district. Interestingly, Neff received a letter from Johnson’s mother, Rebekah Baines Johnson requesting his support. Mrs. Johnson reminisced about how her son had campaigned for Neff when he ran for Texas Railroad Commissioner and noted how he had wanted “to be like Pat Neff.” She also remembered how, as a schoolteacher in Cotulla, Texas, Lyndon had “began teaching public speaking” using Neff’s “orations, declamations, speeches and diction.” Johnson’s biographer, Robert Caro, later repeated the story of how Johnson taught debate to poor Mexican-American students in Cotulla and frequently carried with him a dog-eared and heavily noted copy of Neff’s Battles of Peace. Clearly, Johnson used Neff’s oratory as a pattern for teaching debate to his very effective debate squad. A few days later, Neff replied to Mrs. Johnson, “I have felt a keen interest in Lyndon’s success. I have applauded him with heart and hands at every upward climb….I have talked with him…and he knows just where I can be of assistance to him.” Neff and Johnson maintained contact for many years after their mutual NYA experience.11

Other than finance and keeping students in school, a continuing problem that Neff and his board fought during the Depression was maintaining accreditation. When Neff came to Baylor

---

10Lyndon Johnson to Neff, June 30, 1936, PNP; Neff to Lyndon Johnson, July 3, 1936, PNP.
11Rebekah Baines Johnson to Neff, March 2, 1937, PNP; Robert A. Caro, The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 168, 213; Neff to Rebekah Baines Johnson, March 9, 1937, PNP; See also Garth E. Pauley, LBJ’s American Promise: The 1965 Voting Rights Address (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 126; In the previous work, Pauley reveals the politics and process behind Johnson’s speech entitled “The American Promise” in which the president asked a joint session of Congress for passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The rhetoric Johnson used for the speech is a major component of Pauley’s work. Pauley also recounts how Johnson remembered his students in Cotulla and the “disadvantage” and “discrimination” they suffered as he prepared the speech.
in 1933, the institution already held a “conditional” status with its accrediting organization, the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (SACSS). In a letter from W.D. Hooper, Chairman of SACSS, to Dr. William S. Allen, interim President of Baylor, the organization cited concerns about Baylor’s annuity payments and reduced endowments, and also noted the institution’s low per student expenditures. Hooper told Allen the university would have to continue its “conditional” status for another year. Allen replied that Baylor was making progress on reducing its annuities payments and had even received some large donations. He added that the university continued to “pay full salaries” and probably would through the rest of the school year. The university’s ability to pay salaries, especially of its professors, eventually became problematic.12

In December of 1933, Hooper wrote Neff again about Baylor’s finances. Hooper noted that the school had operated at a loss of $37,000 while paying out $40,000 in free tuition. In addition, Baylor spent $14,000 for athletics which Hooper characterized as “unwise.” Hooper also warned that all departments of the university should be recognized by their various national organizations and then requested a complete financial audit for review by SACSS. Neff handed off the job of replying to Hooper to Allen, who continued as Baylor’s vice president. Allen began by noting that Baylor continued to have problems with annuity payments and endowments but that the situation had improved from earlier in the year. Allen directly addressed Hooper’s concerns about departmental accreditation noting that all but the law school was recognized by their professional organizations. Finally, he wrote, “We are reducing our indebtedness rapidly

12W.D. Hooper to William S. Allen, January 4, 1933, PNP; Allen to Hooper, January 7, 1933, PNP.
and...have an enrollment of nearly forty percent increase over that of a year ago.” Baylor was making slow progress on its accreditation problems.13

In December of 1935, Neff received another letter from SACSS, this time from its new chairman, Theodore Jack. Either Jack was a less patient man than Hooper, or SACSS was losing its patience. Jack began by complaining that they had not received Baylor’s annual report in time for proper review. He further complained that the university had apparently only sent a balance sheet rather than an itemized financial report. Another problem, not previously mentioned, was that the university was allowing classes to be taught by “young teachers without degrees.” In addition, fully twenty-seven instructors held only bachelor’s degrees. Jack further noted that Baylor continued to have one of the lowest expenditures per student of any school in the association. The school’s library acquisition budget was also too low. Ominously, Jack warned, “Unless a better showing is made next year, we will feel it quite necessary to have a ‘special study.’” Apparently, Baylor had economized in ways detrimental to maintaining accreditation. In all likelihood, the university was preoccupied with keeping its doors opened. Nevertheless, Neff and Baylor clearly needed to improve the university’s financial and instructional situation.14

A little more than a year later, SACSS made an assessment of Baylor’s progress. By this time, Jack had been replaced by O.C. Carmichael of Vanderbilt University. Carmichael noted in a letter to Neff, that SACSS “recognizes improvements” but that “there are a number of deficiencies in meeting the standards” of the organization. Carmichael went on to list several of the problems that Jack had mentioned the previous year including low salaries and low student expenditures. He added, “It seems to us you have entirely too many students for the size and

13Hooper to Neff, December 14, 1933, PNP; Allen to Hooper, December 20, 1933, PNP.
14Theodore Jack to Neff, December 30, 1935, PNP.
strength of your faculty.” Furthermore, “The very large amount of student aid which you give and also the large amount of student notes receivable would indicate you are not getting from you students as much money...as could probably be arranged.” Carmichael’s and SACSS’ criticisms got to the heart of the problems of running a private institution of higher learning during the Depression. At the time, people generally acknowledged that “everyone is poor.” While the assertion is exaggerated, the fact was that in every part of the economy, including higher education, too few dollars were chasing too many people. Carmichael informed Neff that Baylor would continue its SACSS membership on a “conditional basis” for the next year.15

Over the course of the next eighteen months, Baylor’s financial situation improved markedly. In November of 1937, President Neff was able to report to the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and to SACSS, that Baylor University had eliminated the debt of nearly $400,000 it held in 1933. Shortly thereafter, Neff received a letter from M.C. Huntley, Executive Secretary for SACSS. Huntley congratulated Neff and informed him that the information would be taken into account for SACSS’ coming report on Baylor. Two months later, Neff was able to report to Huntley that Baylor had been relieved of the obligation of paying an annuity that averaged $50,000 annually. In May, Baylor benefactor M.P. Daniel of Liberty, Texas, died and left 9,000 acres valued at $100,000 to the university. The land was placed in a trust to fund scholarships. Daniel had two sons attending Baylor. William “Bill” Daniel was a major contributor and fundraiser for Baylor’s student union building which is named after him. The other son was Price Daniel who later became governor of Texas and United States Senator

15O.C. Carmichael to Neff, January 7, 1937, PNP.
representing the state. With Baylor’s financial condition improved, its other shortcomings became more pressing.\textsuperscript{16}

For the next two school years, SACSS allowed Neff and Baylor time to address its remaining accreditation problems. In February of 1940, Huntley again wrote Neff concerning Baylor’s accreditation. He first noted that SACSS was pleased that the university had finally gotten faculty salaries adjusted to meet minimum requirements. But, the old problem of too many classes taught by graduate student instructors returned. Huntley further noted that Baylor’s library expenditures at $2.20 per student were below the minimum of $4.00 per student and overall educational expenditures of $129.00 per student were below the minimum of $150.00. Finally, Baylor’s ratio of student fees to total expenditures was 105 percent. The university’s per student spending was too low and it was almost entirely dependent on student fees. Two months later, Huntley wrote Neff to inform him that SACSS had placed Baylor University on probation citing “excessive use of teaching fellows, failure to meet the minimum requirement…of per student expenditure for instruction, and excessive proportion of student fees to instructional cost.” The SACSS organization had been patient with Baylor. Now that its finances were in order, and as the economy improved, SACSS clearly expected Baylor to address its problems.\textsuperscript{17}

Ten days later, Neff replied to Huntley’s news. President Neff first sought to reassure SACSS stating, “I wish to assure you that Baylor University will put forth every effort every effort possible to meet the requirements as set forth in your communication.” In order to show good faith effort, Neff added, “In regard to the use of teaching fellows, [I] wish to say we have

\textsuperscript{16}“President’s Report to the Baptist General Convention [of Texas],” November 10, 1937, Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees—Waco Executive Committee—Minutes. 1933-1957. Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; M.C. Huntley to Neff, November 24, 1937, PNP; Neff to M.C. Huntley, January 17, 1938, PNP.

\textsuperscript{17}M.C. Huntley to Neff, February 20, 1940, PNP; M.C. Huntley to Neff, April 20, 1940, PNP.
already corrected that. We did so at the beginning of our present spring quarter. During the coming school year we will comply in a most satisfactory manner.” Neff then addressed SACSS’ two other complaints about per student educational expenditures and the high ratio of student fees to expenditures. He noted, as SACSS was well aware, that these problems were the result of “the lack of having a sufficient endowment.” He then called upon earlier discussions with SACSS officials in which they suggested that Baylor find a “well established” organization that was “interested” in the institution to make annual contributions in order to supplement the endowment fund. Of course, Neff already had such an organization in mind. A few days prior, he warned the Baylor Board of Trustees that the university faced losing its accreditation by November 1, 1940 if it did not comply and suggested they ask the Baptist General Convention of Texas to contribute $50,000 annually. Within two weeks, Texas Baptists agreed to contribute $30,000 annually and Baylor received full accreditation by SACSS. In January of 1941, SACSS rated Baylor as a member in “good standing” for the first time in years.18

Aside from the immediate concern of keeping Baylor’s doors opened, and students enrolled, an on-going concern of President Neff was that of maintaining discipline and Christian morals among the student body. This took many forms including daily chapel meetings and ongoing campaigns against hazing and the ills of smoking, drinking, and dancing. The daily chapel meetings were a decades-old tradition at Baylor that Neff not only cherished for tradition’s sake but also appreciated for its value in maintaining order and discipline. These meetings of the faculty, staff, and students lasted thirty minutes every morning and were

18Neff to M.C. Huntley, April 30, 1940, PNP; Neff to Board of Trustees, April 16, 1941, Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees, General Board, 1934-1955, (Box, V. 15), Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Neff to Board of Trustees, May 1, 1941, Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees, General Board, 1934-1955, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Neff to Board of Trustees, April 16, 1941, Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees, General Board, 1934-1955, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; M.C. Huntley to Neff, January 4, 1942, Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees, General Board, 1934-1955, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.
regarded as central to religious life at Baylor. In one such meeting shortly after he came to Baylor, and at the height of a hazing scandal, Neff took the opportunity to council students on good and moral behavior. Neff stated, “Now, I want to know how the student body stands this morning.” He exhorted students to be “brave” and to “stand by your conscience.” Neff asked, “I am just wondering how many students…are willing to say they will help us put out hazing, drinking, and disorderly conduct…that we are going to stand for a sober, student body…for the law, for morals and decency.” Neff then asked those who agreed to stand—everyone stood. This set the tone and tenor of Neff’s administration with respect to student behavior. The new president also established order over the university and its student body—like a good southern Progressive.19

Neff took an early stand against hazing which could include anything from physical and emotional abuse to using freshmen as errand runners. At the start of the 1933-1934 school year, Baylor’s president delivered an “unqualified denunciation of student hazing” during morning chapel service. He added that those found guilty of hazing would be expelled and, furthermore, their names would be turned over to the District Attorney’s Office for prosecution. A few months later, in another chapel meeting, Neff sought to let students know who was boss. He, with the permission of Baylor’s trustees, suspended seven students indefinitely for “hazing, drunkenness on campus…and conduct unbecoming a student.” Neff also expelled three students. One group of students submitted an official letter of protest to Neff and the administration. Neff replied with a warning, “It is not the intention of the trustees, the faculty, or the president to surrender to you or to any other group of students the administrative affairs of the institution.”

---

19Report of the President and Board of Trustees of Baylor University [to the Baptist General Convention of Texas] for the School Year 1932-1933, PNP; “An Epoch Making Chapel Service of Baylor University,” Pamphlet, November 14, 1933, PNP.
Neff was very serious about ending the practice of hazing, as well as drinking, and made sure students knew this in no uncertain terms.\footnote{Head of Baylor Wins Support in Ouster Orders,” \textit{New Orleans Times-Picayune}, November 17, 1933; “Neff Denounces Hazing,” DMN, September 26, 1933; “Baylor Students Rebuked by Neff in Assembly Plea,” DMN, November 26, 1933.}

The public denunciation of hazing was widely reported in the press and Neff received many letters of support on his stand against the practice. J.J. Walden of Fort Worth wrote Neff on the subject. Walden noted, “I have a son in your school…and I would hate to know of any of the seniors or upperclassmen beating him up just because they happened to be an upperclassmen.” He added, “I am spending my money for him to learn something down there and not to have him running errands for other folks.” Walden complimented Neff and wished him luck. Neff also received a letter from someone likely well versed on the problem of hazing, W.H. Bruce, President Emeritus of North Texas State Teacher’s College in Denton. Bruce wrote, “I am glad that you have taken so courageous and so positive a stand against some of the evils that are besetting some of our educational institutions.” Bruce added, “Your attitude and your action have neither surprised me, for I know you have counted character far above knowledge and skill in any scheme of education.” Bruce’s assessment of Neff’s educational philosophy is quite accurate. Though Neff certainly valued “knowledge” and “skill” in Baylor students, he was intent on producing graduates of good moral and personal character.\footnote{Jesse J. Walden to Neff, September 26, 1933, PNP; W.H. Bruce to Neff, November 25, 1933, PNP.}

In subsequent years, Baylor had relatively few incidents of hazing. Student drinking continued and Neff, as he always had, took the issue very seriously. In October 1937, he dismissed three students, two young men and a young woman. One of the male students was accused of “drunkenness” on campus. The other was accused of “conduct unbecoming of a student.” The female student was accused of “setting up standards of conduct in the dormitory
and on the campus contrary to Baylor ideals.” The expulsions were announced, as most often happened, in the morning chapel service. Neff again warned, “Regardless of the number of beer joints in Waco and McLennan County, the dormitories and campus at Baylor continue dry territory.” A few days later, the editors of the *Dallas Morning News* commented on Neff’s policies. The editors noted that expulsion was a “severe” penalty that likely met with the approval of Baylor supporters and parents of college aged students in general. They added that the policy seemed to be a paraphrasing of the state’s policy on drunk driving: “If you go to Baylor, don’t drink; if you drink, don’t go to Baylor.” The editor’s were less approving of Neff’s habit of using public expulsions noting, “Best results in young lives are achieved when the discipline is applied as inconspicuously as possible.” While many approved of Neff’s policies, his apparent heavy-handedness in the application of punishment was a frequent criticism.22

In spite of Neff’s tough reputation on disciplinary matters, if a student were properly penitent, Neff sometimes relented. Wilbert Lasater, whose family owned a grocery store in Tyler, was suspended for hazing in the fall of 1936. Lasater’s mother appealed to Neff noting that Wilbert was “so humiliated that he did not even want to go out of the house.” She, of course, asked Neff to reinstate her son. A few days later Neff replied that “he will not be readmitted…so long as he feels that the institution is wrong, that the president is wrong, and that he alone is right.” Shortly thereafter, Wilbert himself wrote Neff noting, “I can now see how far wrong I was in my outlook on college life….The fact that I was suspended from school hurt my parents terribly….I beg you to let me back in school so that I can redeem myself with them.” For good measure, Wilbert added, “I will promise, you as a man, that if you let me reenter

---

22“Three Students Expelled as Baylor President Warns Campus is Dry,” DMN, October 19, 1937; “Dry Campus,” Editorial, DMN, October 23, 1937; McLennan County remained dry until 1945 when beer was legalized. Nevertheless, Neff was always concerned that students may bring alcoholic beverages purchased elsewhere onto campus.
Baylor…I will make you an ideal student and will live up to the high standards which you have
set.” Neff could not begrudge the young man a chance at redemption. He wrote Lasater noting
that it was “unusual” to readmit a suspended student in the very next semester. But, he added,
“You have been so exceedingly nice” and “now have the proper attitude toward the university
and its rules….I cannot get my consent to refuse your application.”

Smoking was another of the objectionable habits that Neff sought to eliminate in Baylor
students. Tobacco usage had been controversial amongst Baptists for many years. Some
churches accepted chewing tobacco, even allowing placement of spittoons. Others deemed the
use of tobacco products a bad habit not to be encouraged. The prohibition against smoking on
Baylor’s campus had a long history dating back to Rufus Burleson’s presidency of the institution
during the nineteenth century. Neff applied the anti-smoking rule particularly strongly on the
university’s female students. In April of 1941, Neff announced a smoking ban affecting all
female students beginning the next school year. Prospective female students who smoked would
not be admitted to the university; those who picked up the habit would be sent home. Sadie
Crawley, Baylor’s Dean of Women, was to interview all female students applying for admission
to dormitories. In addition, Crawley asked incoming students to sign a four-point pledge not to
smoke in either in public or in private, on campus or off. The smoking ban, for both male and
female students, continued throughout Neff’s tenure at Baylor but became increasingly
unpopular among veterans returning to school after the war.

23Mrs. G.H. Lasater to Neff, Letter, October 9, 1936, PNP; Wilbert Lasater to Neff, Letter, Undated, PNP;
Lasater continued his education and graduated from the University of Texas School of Law. He practiced in Tyler,
Texas.

24Harvey, Redeeming the South, 84; “The State Press,” Editorial, DMN, February 12, 1938; “No Smoking
Sign Put up for Coeds by Baylor Prexy,” DMN, May 27, 1941.
Another “discipline” problem during Neff’s time at Baylor was dancing. Smoking, drinking, and dancing were all considered “sinful recreations” by many Baptists. Modern dance was a particular problem, as it was believed that it overly sexualized women; modern music in the “Jazz Age” was almost as troublesome. Many American parents, not just Baptists, disapproved. Dancing, of course, was prohibited on Baylor’s campus. Furthermore, students were prohibited from attending dances but school officials could do relatively little to stop off-campus events. Rubalee Hankamer, wife of Baylor Board of Trustees member Earl Hankamer, heard of such events and wrote Neff to express her concern. Hankamer wrote, “The dances are given in Baylor’s name without any supervision by her. By your attitude [of inaction], you give your sanction.” Hankamer then suggested that female students be prohibited from staying out of dormitories at night. A few weeks later, Neff replied, “I am not in favor of having dances on the Baylor campus, either supervised or unsupervised.” On the issue of a requirement for female students to stay in dorms, Neff wrote, “It is a debatable question whether young ladies should spend any night away from the dormitory. Not to permit this seems to be to be an unnecessary hardship on the young ladies.” Neff then explained that since women students were allowed to leave campus at night, they would just have to be trusted. Here Neff showed a capacity for understanding despite his reputation for inflexibility.25

Not everyone knew about Baylor’s “no dancing” policy. In June of 1940, Neff received a letter from Francis C. Barton, Director of Program Services at Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS). Barton was putting together a radio program that would feature “collegiate dance orchestras.” The show, to air on CBS’ nationwide network, would pit the nation’s best and most popular college bands against each other to find the “leading” band. Barton noted that CBS was

25Paula Fass, The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 305; Harvey, Redeeming the South, 83–4; Rubalee Hankamer to Neff, October 14, 1935, PNP; Neff to Rubalee Hankamer, November 14, 1935, PNP.
looking for “undergraduate dance orchestras” that “remained on the campus” and “identified with the school itself.” Barton added, for good measure, “We are certain public interest would follow and publicity values of the best kind accrue to institutions participating in such a program.” Barton had clearly not done his homework. A few days later, Neff politely declined Barton’s offer. He wrote, “We do not have in connection with Baylor University any character of dance. Neither do we have any orchestra or musical group that plays for student dances.” Neff concluded, almost wistfully, “Therefore, I take it we are not in a position to be a part of the network [program] mentioned by you.” He closed, “Thanking you cordially for having thought of us.” Barton was probably right about the publicity the show would have brought Baylor, but not the character of it.26

Along with building the character of Baylor’s students, another major concern during Neff’s tenure was building the university itself. After the school’s financial condition stabilized in 1937, Neff and the Board of Trustees undertook a major building campaign. Part of the reasoning behind the campaign was to meet SACSS requirements, but another major force behind it was the need to grow the school and insure its future. Between 1938 and 1940, Baylor began construction on four major buildings: Alexander Hall (a dormitory), the Marrs McLean Physical Education Building, the Bill Daniel Student Union Building, and Pat Neff Hall, an administration building. In addition, the university began fund raising efforts on two additional buildings: the Tidwell Bible Building, and the Browning Library. The latter building was specifically designed to house Baylor’s large collection of the works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Neff took a special interest, as would be expected, in the construction of the new administration building to be named for him. The large redbrick building, located in the center

26Francis C. Barton Jr. to Neff, June 27, 1940, PNP; Neff to Francis C. Barton Jr., July 3, 1940, PNP.
of the university’s campus, was topped by a handsome clock tower. When completed, Neff’s office was located in the building.\textsuperscript{27}

Neff and Baylor trustees also sought to place the university in a position to serve the country in event of war. Building new facilities could only aid Baylor in the process. In November of 1939, President Neff recommended that the board authorize construction of Alexander Hall. Neff reported that “in order for the building to be ready for occupancy by Sept. 1940, we should at once employ an architect in order to begin work by Jan. 1, 1940.” Alexander Hall gave Baylor extra space for housing which was crucial for the university during the war years. Baylor housing and classroom facilities enabled the university to secure government contracts to train servicemen for war thus providing revenue. In August of 1939, the trustees asked James Mixon, secretary to President Neff, to investigate a proposal by the Civil Aeronautics Authority to have several Texas colleges set up programs for training air pilots “in case of an emergency.” A little more than a year later, Baylor applied to the Civil Aeronautics Authority to open a flight school, which was subsequently accepted. It was the first of several wartime training programs that Baylor undertook.\textsuperscript{28}

When war did come, Baylor was affected in many ways. The most immediate impact was on the student body itself. College age students were either drafted or volunteered for military service. Only ministerial students remained on campus in relatively large numbers. Labor shortages made filling campus positions increasingly difficult over the course of the war.

\textsuperscript{27}“Report of President Pat M. Neff to the Board of Trustees, Baylor University,” October, 1947, Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees, General Board, 1934-1955. (Box, V. 15), Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

\textsuperscript{28}Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees—Waco Executive Committee—Minutes. 1933-1957, November 29, 1939, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco Texas; Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees—Waco Executive Committee—Minutes. 1933-1957, August 17, 1939, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco Texas; Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees—Waco Executive Committee—Minutes. 1933-1957, September 7, 1940, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco Texas.
There were not enough students left on campus to do the many jobs they had prior to the war. Furthermore, the war caused a general labor shortage that resulted in high competitive wages that Baylor could not pay. At one point, Neff wrote to Baylor trustee D.K. “Doc” Martin on this situation. Neff noted, “I have almost earned my salary…in the past few weeks.” He lamented, “I have not had a great deal of trouble getting high-browed Ph.D.s as teachers, but the difficulty has been in getting cooks, maids, table-setters, dish washers and grass cutters.” He added, “All of us have had a twist at washing dishes and serving tables since the opening of school.” Thus, as everywhere, war brought some hardships but it also brought great change. The greatest example of this was the young servicemen who replaced most of Baylor’s male student body.29

In July of 1942, Neff informed the Baylor Board of Trustees that the federal government had made inquiries to the university about its possible capabilities in “preparing our boys for military service.” Neff had responded that the university would be “cooperating in every way possible.” Trainees were to receive instruction in “physical education, military discipline, radio code work, and whatever instruction we are equipped to render in preparing student for pilot service…as well as other branches of military activities.” Neff informed the board that Baylor would receive an initial contingent of thirty men, who would remain on campus for eight weeks. He also stated that Baylor would receive one hundred dollars per man for room, board, and transportation and one hundred sixty-eight dollars for tuition. Ultimately, Baylor was recognized by the United State Armed Forces Institute to teach officer candidates from all services a wide variety of courses including accounting, business administration, general office, education,

29Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees—Waco Executive Committee—Minutes. 1933-1957, September 1942, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Neff to D.K. Martin, October 2, 1942, PNP.
mathematics, political science, psychology, and sociology. Thus, Baylor was able to use its educational facilities to contribute to the war.\(^{30}\)

Neff and the trustees did not begin the undertaking lightly. One factor they had to consider was the moral and religious implications of a Christian college training men for war. There was the possibility that Baylor supporters and alumni would disapprove of the university taking such an active role in the war. Neff thought that the nation faced too great a threat for Baylor not to contribute. He wrote, “It is my thought that Baylor University should cooperate as far as our abilities and equipment will permit with the federal government in this education and training of our men for military services.” He noted, “In doing this, we may be violating some of the fundamental principles of our denominational teachings, but the present war is a total war, and we are involved in it….Before obligating ourselves to comply…I present herewith the thought to you for your consideration and your instructions.” The board, of course, agreed with Neff. One concession that trustees did make was that, “that the Army boys mentioned…while on the campus…would be required to conform to all rules and regulations of Baylor…and would not be permitted to remain as students…if they did not.” Thus, like any other Baylor students, there would be no drinking, no smoking, and no dancing for trainees while on campus.\(^{31}\)

As the war progressed, Baylor consistently tried to accommodate as many trainees as possible, in as many programs as possible. In May of 1943, Neff wrote to Sadie Crawley, former dean of women, “We now have four hundred Army trainees and seventy Navy students. I am pleased with our Army unit far better than I thought I would be….They are under strict discipline and…are really a fine set of youngsters.” As far as harmony between military trainees and

\(^{30}\)Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees—Waco Executive Committee—Minutes. 1933-1957. July 2, 1942, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Colonel Francis Spaulding to Neff, June 9, 1943, PNP.

\(^{31}\)Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees—Waco Executive Committee—Minutes. 1933-1957. July 2, 1942, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.
students, Neff wrote, “I believe their coming has been helpful….the line of demarcation between our students and the Army students will be so well kept that neither one will know that the other is here.” Baylor was limited in the number of trainees it could handle by the availability of housing. Baylor contracted to take 400 Army trainees beginning on May 10, 1943. This necessitated teaching night classes and moving up graduation in order to clear dormitory space for the trainees. At about the same time, Neff discussed the possibility of housing and training Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps trainees with their commander, Oveta Culp Hobby. This plan did not come to fruition because of a lack of space. Ultimately, military training programs allowed Baylor to contribute to the war effort and its bottom line in a period when students, particularly male students, were largely unavailable.32

By 1944, Neff had been able to steer Baylor through the depths of the Great Depression and most of the Second World War. He had used all of his leadership and organizational skills just to keep the institution running. As the war drew to a close, Baylor University, like the United States as a whole, was poised for a period of growth and prosperity. In April 1944, Neff realized that more organizational talent than his own was required. He hired a professional business manager for the university—the first in its history. Several influential Baylor trustees including, “Doc” Martin, Alva Bryan, and Earl Hankamer had been arguing for the move for several years. They believed a “competent” business manager was necessary and would relieve Neff of dealing with day-to-day details and would facilitate post-war expansion plans. Neff personally interviewed and chose Roy McKnight who had been business manager and treasurer at Oklahoma Baptist University. He had studied business at University of Oklahoma, University of Chicago, and Columbia University. The trustees concurred with Neff’s decision and

32Neff to Sadie Crawley, May 20, 1943, PNP; Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees—Waco Executive Committee—Minutes. 1933-1957, April 19, 1943, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Neff to Oveta Culp Hobby, January 6, 1943, PNP.
McKnight was placed in charge of “all business and financial affairs of the university, including accounting, reporting, office management, purchasing, and supervision of the general plant including two cafeterias, six dormitories, the printing plant, bookstore, and the making of the budget.” The move was representative of the Southern Progressive penchant for professionalization and introduction of modern business practices and was exactly what the university needed at the time.\(^{33}\)

McKnight quickly set about instituting modern accounting and business practices at Baylor. McKnight started his work with the registrar’s office where he sought to streamline record keeping and intra office communication. McKnight also destroyed records that had previously been kept “indefinitely” while instilling in employees the idea that “the value of a record must exceed the cost of keeping it.” McKnight noted that it was taking the registrar’s office a month or more to send out grades at the end of a semester. Transcript requests and catalog requests also frequently ran late as well. McKnight identified bottle necks that slowed work in the office and assigned specific responsibilities to all office personnel. McKnight reported to Neff, “employees have accepted their assignments and…procedure. All work except the evaluation of transcripts is up to date.” He also reduced payroll hours in the office for a savings of 50 percent. Thus, Roy McKnight brought new efficiency to Baylor University. He then began reviewing the rest of Baylor’s operations and set about finding ways to increase revenue and grow the university.\(^{34}\)

Where McKnight contributed most to Baylor was in planning for its postwar growth. In July of 1946, McKnight recommended to Neff that for the next school year, Baylor should

\(^{33}\)Earl Hankamer to Neff, April 15, 1944, PNP; Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees, General Board, 1934-1955, (Box, V. 15), April 27,1944, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

\(^{34}\)Roy McKnight to Neff, Report, May 4, 1945, PNP.
accept the maximum number of students the school could possibly accommodate. McKnight surveyed classroom, laboratory, and dormitory facilities to calculate maximum capacities and made several suggestions. He pointed out to Neff and the trustees that after the war, the university could expect an influx of returning servicemen as students. He further noted that Congress was working on the legislation that became the G.I. Bill. More directly, McKnight stated, “The acceptance of a large enrollment for next year will help to insure the future financial position of the university. The government is willing to pay the bills and is expending millions of dollars on veterans’ education.” Then he warned, “Irreparable damage will be done if we fail to take advantage of this opportunity.” McKnight further noted that Baylor needed to increase its enrollment to justify the two million dollar building campaign it planned. Finally, he made the point that few board members were likely to deny—by increasing enrollment Baylor would be able to provide a Christian education to more students. Thus, McKnight suggested a program for the postwar growth of Baylor University that took advantage of increases in federal spending on higher education that were soon to come.\textsuperscript{35}

The end of the war also brought other immediate opportunities for the growth of Baylor. During the war, the Waco area had been a center for military training and operation. With the end of the war, the federal government no longer needed much of that property and was prepared to dispense with it at cut-rate prices. McKnight recognized the opportunity for growth writing Neff that, “Baylor has the opportunity of a century to build a really great Baptist university. To take advantage of this situation will safeguard the future by providing buildings, funds, and enrollment.” McKnight added, “It is raining [federal] money for education. All we need to do to catch some is to turn our tub over.” Baylor took the suggestion. During the summer of 1947,

\textsuperscript{35} McKnight to Neff, July 16, 1946, PNP; McKnight to Neff, July 22, 1946.
Neff corresponded with trustee D.K. Martin and commented on the changes Baylor was undergoing. Neff noted that several new buildings were under construction on land adjacent to Baylor’s main campus using “war surplus” lumber. A new men’s dormitory was in the final stages of construction and would house two hundred fifty students the next fall. The new union building, which had stood as an empty shell during the war, was finally nearing completion and promised to be partially functional at the start of the 1947-1948 school year. Baylor also obtained land located on an airfield about seven miles from Waco to house returning veterans, now students, and their families.36

By 1947, Baylor was financially secure and growing. Enrollment had almost tripled from 1,125 in 1932 when Neff became president of the institution, to 4,506 in 1947. The school was very nearly at its maximum capacity of about 5,000 students as suggested by McKnight. In 1932, Baylor’s net worth was $3.9 million; by 1945 it had already reached $9.2 million and grew further with the university’s postwar building campaign. When Neff took the helm of the institution, it was indebted and in danger. By late 1947, when Neff left Baylor, the institution was financially secure and thriving by all indications. Neff systematically ran the institution with the Southern Progressive ideals of good governance and efficiency in mind. When the university began to outgrow Neff’s abilities to run it, he brought in a professional business manager—Roy McKnight. McKnight brought new efficiency and vision at a critical time in Baylor’s history. Neff and the Baylor Board of Trustees supported McKnight and the institution thrived. At the same time, Neff’s Christian ideals were much more useful and pertinent at Baylor than they had been in politics. Christian education was important to Neff. Christian values and moral strength among Baylor students were not suggestions—they were

36Roy McKnight to Neff, March 21, 1946, PNP; Neff to D.K. Martin, July 27, 1947, PNP; Neff to D.K. Martin, August 25, 1947, PNP.
requirements. By the end of the war, Neff’s days as president of Baylor were growing short.

The world was changing; some embraced the change, others resisted it. As was frequently the case, Neff was caught between them.37

37“Report of President Pat M. Neff to the Board of Trustees, Baylor University,” October 1947, Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees, General Board, 1934-1955 (Box, V. 15), Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Roy McKnight to Neff, March 21, 1946, PNP.
CHAPTER 13

“OLD PROGRESSIVES NEVER DIE….”

The battles of peace are never ended. We advance today as our thoughts lead us. We shall stand tomorrow in keeping with the dreams that inspire us, and the visions that beckon us. We shall travel in the years to come, onward and upward, winning the battles of peace as the ideals of service possess us.

--Pat M. Neff

In the quote above, Neff’s perception of the ongoing nature of Progressive reform is evident—it is never ending. More important, it is clearly based on “thoughts” or “visions” of what “tomorrow” should be. Finally, public service was a necessary part of bringing about a better world. Thus, for many years after the so-called end of the Progressive era, Neff served in a variety of capacities, and on a number of projects, that he no doubt believed served the purposes of progress and service to humanity. In the last few years of Neff’s public life, he took on the additional post of president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Meanwhile, the political landscape of the world, the nation, the South, and Texas all changed markedly in the aftermath of the Great Depression and New Deal and the Second World War. Though Neff maintained his policy of keeping politics at arms length, his reputation and stature within the Texas Democratic Party often required him to act as a “peace maker” between “New Dealers” and “Texas Regulars” who disagreed upon the direction of the state and nation. Texas Baptists, whom Neff also led, were greatly concerned about peace and prosperity in the postwar world and nation, as well as the role of African-Americans both within and outside of the denomination. The coming of social and political change in the postwar world was a challenge for anyone in a leadership role. The last few years of Neff’s public life bear this out.1

1George N. Green, The Establishment in Texas Politics: The Primative Years, 1938-1957 (Norman:
In 1940, one of the most controversial political issues was President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s re-nomination for an unprecedented third term. The Texas Democratic Party already lay splintered over the New Deal and the associated perception of a free-spending and large federal government that impinged on “states’ rights.” Consequently, New Dealers and more conservative “Texas Regulars” were already engaged in a struggle for control of the party. The additional strain of a possible third term for Roosevelt threatened an outright split. Many Texas Democrats supported Roosevelt’s Vice-President, “Cactus” Jack Garner, also of Texas, to succeed the President. Garner, though part of the administration, had come to oppose New Deal policies. In late 1939, Garner announced that he would accept the Democratic nomination for president if it were given to him. In May 1939, Neff received a letter from Clara Driscoll, co-chairman of the Garner for President Committee asking Neff to serve on the organization’s executive committee. Shortly thereafter, Neff replied in the affirmative to the organization’s other co-chair, E.B. Germany who was also chairman of the state party. It is not clear how great a role Neff played in the movement, but when asked by Germany to speak on Garner’s behalf in the spring of 1939, Neff wrote back that his schedule was “full” for the entire month of June and that he was not accepting engagements after July 1 because of “some half-baked plans” that would “prevent my filling any speaking dates for either July or August.” Neff was likely hedging his political bets, having learned a valuable lesson in the episode with Hoover. Neff

University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), see Chapter 2, “Rise of Conservatism.”; Green’s work traces the shift among Texas conservatives away from the Democratic and toward the Republican Party. Green contends that resistance to New Deal liberalism, as well as rapid urbanization and industrialization, precipitated the shift. See also Frank Freidel, F.D.R. and the South (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1965). Freidel makes the point that Roosevelt was familiar with Southern life and politics. The president’s “dilemma” was that he needed Southern support for his reforms yet these reforms would fundamentally change the South—thus such support was probably temporary. The cracks in Roosevelt’s support came early in Texas.
allowed his name to be associated with the Garner movement but did not invest his time too heavily in it.  

The Texas Democratic Convention of 1940 was held in Waco on the Baylor University campus in Waco Hall. As Democrats gathered, signs of discord between Garner and Roosevelt supporters soon became apparent. “Third termers” were led by San Antonio Mayor Maury Maverick who asserted that Garner should withdraw and stated that the convention would most likely be “stampeded” in Roosevelt’s direction. Meanwhile, Myron Blalock, a state Democratic operative and Garner supporter, termed any idea of his candidate’s withdrawal as “ridiculous.” When the convention met, the result was at best a melee and at worst a small riot. Waco police and state highway patrolmen were called to the convention hall to break up fist fights. Police took away “bottles or anything else that could be used as weapons.” Meanwhile, delegates in the convention hall shouted down presiding officers. At this point, the gavel was handed to Neff, who finally brought the convention to order. Neff began by calling on delegates to “be quiet for just a few moments.” He then welcomed “the great Democratic convention to Waco” which drew amused laughter. Thus lightening the mood, Neff next presided over a roll-call vote of delegates all in the name of “democracy,” or a fair say to all parties. Neff noted, “This is the most fun I’ve had in twenty years.” At long last, the convention went about its business of choosing delegates and instructing them. The instructions were to renew the Roosevelt-Garner ticket and to deny participation of the delegation in any anti-Roosevelt movement at the national convention. Among the delegates chosen was Neff who was named a Texas delegate-at-large to

---

2Scott Sosebee, “The Split in the Texas Democratic Party, 1936-1956.” Master’s Thesis. Texas Tech University. Lubbock, Texas, 2000; Sosebe characterizes the state of Texas Democratic Party politics as being a three-sided split between liberals, conservatives, and party loyalists who had yet to take a side. Neff may have been among the latter group. However, his later actions suggest he genuinely supported many of President Truman’s policies. Lionel V. Patenaude, "GARNER, JOHN NANCE," Handbook of Texas Online, accessed February 10, 2011, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fga24; Clara Driscoll to Neff, May 13, 1939, PNP; Neff to E.B. Germany, March 30, 1939.
the coming Democratic National Convention in Chicago after having ably played the role of peace maker.\textsuperscript{3}

When the delegates met in Chicago the following July, there was still considerable question as to whether or not Roosevelt would actually run for re-election. In a statement read to the delegates by Senator Alben Barkley of Kentucky, the President expressed “no desire or purpose” to run again. This was met by calls of “We want Roosevelt!” Barkley added, “He wishes…to make it clear that all of the delegates…are free to vote for any candidate.” Roosevelt supporters took this to mean they could continue their efforts—and they did. The next day, Democrats re-nominated Roosevelt by a wide margin on the first ballot. The possibility of the nation’s first three term presidency was highly controversial. Many Texas Democrats threatened to support the Republican nominee, Wendell Willkie. A group from Corpus Christi even advocated a fusion ticket with Willkie at the head of the Democratic ticket. The movement for Willkie thus posed the possibility of greater fracturing of the party as well as erosion of support for its candidates. It was, in fact, a serious political problem for Democrats throughout the South that was indicative of greater problems ahead.\textsuperscript{4}

Just as in the case of Hoover’s candidacy, the movement for Willkie also strained the relations of long-time friends and political allies. Shortly after the convention, Neff corresponded with his friend, and Baylor Board of Trustees member, D.K. “Doc” Martin. In early August, Martin suggested Neff “give out a statement and become connected” with the

\textsuperscript{3}“Maverick Men Want Jones Vice-President,” \textit{DMN}, 5-27-40; “Most Tempestuous Scenes of Democratic Conventions in Many Years Enacted at Waco,” \textit{DMN}, 5-29-40; “Texas Delegation Will Back Garner,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, 5-29-40; “Session Picks Delegates for Chicago Meet,” \textit{DMN}, 5-29-40; South Texans had a reputation for their ability to gather votes and thus held much influence. For more see Evan Anders, \textit{Boss Rule in South Texas: The Progressive Era} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982.)

movement for Willkie. Neff politely declined the request but conceded that he thought the party had “made a mistake in nominating Roosevelt for a third term” and added that it was “contrary to the traditions and teachings of our Democratic government.” As some consolation to Martin, Neff stated that he was “not in favor of all the policies” of the administration, nor for that matter, the recent actions of the party. Neff declined to specifically identify policies he did or did not agree with. Nevertheless, Neff indicated that he would continue to support the party stating, “I believe in party organizations….A party organization cannot be maintained if all the members quit the party every time the party does something that seems…to be unwise.” The episode reveals some interesting realities. First of all, Martin, like others, probably assumed that Neff held the same political views he did. Neff’s habit of keeping his political views to himself, and especially not expressing them publicly, was confusing to many. Secondly, the episode reveals the importance Neff placed in loyalty and integrity. Together, these two realities are what made Neff a statesman and enabled him to be a peace maker within his party.5

That fall, Neff played the role of a loyal Democrat by actively campaigning for Roosevelt. After the president’s re-election, Neff received thank-you letters from Congressman John W. McCormack, chairman of the Speaker’s Bureau of the DNC, and Edward J. Flynn, Roosevelt crony and chairman of the DNC. Four years later, with the Second World War raging, Roosevelt again sought re-election. This time, the possibility of another term for the president was just as controversial as it had been in 1940, possibly more so. This was certainly true in Texas. As the Texas Democratic Convention of 1944 approached, the party was already divided into two factions—one supporting a delegation to the national convention that was instructed to vote for Roosevelt, and another supporting a completely uninstructed delegation. Before the

5 Neff to D.K. Martin, August, 14, 1940, PNP.
convention even met in Austin, the two factions fought over who would preside over the meeting. Many looked toward Neff to mediate. When the convention finally began, in the Senate chamber of the State Capitol, Roosevelt supporters immediately broke ranks and retired to the House chamber. Meanwhile, former Governor Dan Moody presided as temporary chairman of the official convention in the Senate. As party leaders sought to reach some consensus, Moody called upon Neff to address the convention. Neff admonished the delegates, “Abide by the majority vote when the fight is over. Don’t go off a pouting if you lose.” He also suggested the democracy should rule at home as the nation fought for it abroad. Neff left the podium to resounding applause and the official convention sent an uninstructed delegation that was mostly opposed to Roosevelt’s re-nomination. Meanwhile, the rump convention sent its own delegation supporting Roosevelt.6

By 1944, Texas Democrats were deeply split by the direction of their party and nation. The rift that had developed could not be mended even by the able oratory of former Governor Neff. When the Democratic National Convention again met in Chicago, political observers noted an obvious split between “liberal New Dealers” and “southern revolters.” Many expected Texans to play an important role in the convention that was expected to choose a new vice-president who would likely succeed Roosevelt. This included the delegation of Texas Regulars sent by the rump convention. Amid their efforts to be seated by convention officials, and to thwart the re-nomination of Roosevelt, they sent Neff a telegram that read, “We have come home at milking time but we are doing the milking.” Neff took the time to attach a note to the telegram explaining that in the course of his speech at the earlier state convention he had told delegates “not to worry about those boys who had bolted….they would all come home at milking

6John W. McCormack to Neff, November 20, 1940, PNP; Edward J. Flynn to Neff, November 14, 1940; “Bitter Lines Drawn to Fight for Control of State Convention,” DMN, May 23, 1944; “Violent Democratic Upheaval Follows Refusal to Bind Electors to Nominee,” DMN, May 24, 1944.
time.” That was clearly not the case. In the end, as many expected, the New Dealers did the "milking" and re-nominated Roosevelt for president and nominated Harry Truman for vice-president. The Texas Regulars, as well as the other southern conservatives, went home disappointed and no doubt feeling increasingly marginalized in their own party. Unlike Neff, few of them remained loyal to the Democratic Party for long.  

As Texas Democrats prepared for an uncertain future, so did southern Baptists. When the SBC met for its annual meeting in 1942, held in San Antonio, the war and the very future of Christianity were among the problems on the minds of attendees. Speaking before the convention, Dr. George Truett, Neff friend and pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, told members, “dark and difficult as the present world situation may seem, this is not a time for the weakening of Christian faith, but for its strengthening.” In this time of crisis, choosing a new leader of the Southern Baptist Convention was paramount and Neff’s name was mentioned immediately. In the waning days of the convention, he became the first layman elected to the post in thirty-two years. His closing remarks to the convention were a compilation of elements from past speeches that were nonetheless relevant. The new president reminded the convention that the “battles of peace” are to be fought both at home and abroad. Neff added, “Our flag stands for all that Christianity stands for” noting the American constitutional freedom of religion and that the flag had been “flying victoriously” through six wars. With a final appeal to American patriotism, President Neff concluded that the flag would be “true” to its reputation and the country would win the war “and the peace to follow.” As president of the SBC in the closing

---

7“‘The When, Who, What and How of the Democratic National Convention,” Kansas City Plaindealer, July 28, 1944; “Wide-Open Democratic Battle Seen over Vice-Presidential Nomination.” DMN July 16, 1944; “Rump Convention” to Neff, July 20, 1944, Note attached, PNP; Neff’s attachment of a note to the above mentioned telegram is a rare example of a historical figure recognizing the significance of a document and recording its significance for posterity.

290
years of the war, Neff often spoke to Southern Baptists about the future of both the country and their faith—often using typical Progressive rhetoric.8

Neff was an occasional speaker on “The Baptist Hour.” The show, sponsored by the SBC, aired on Sunday mornings and was carried by some thirty-eight radio stations throughout the South with an estimated listening audience of 8,000,000. Stations carrying the program included several high-power stations and four “clear channel” stations with large audiences: WFAA in Dallas, WHAS in Louisville, KWKH in Shreveport, and WSM home of the “Grand Ol’ Opry” in Nashville. In one of Neff’s earliest engagements on the show, he chose a topic near and dear to his heart, “Christian Education.” The topic was fitting as he had been President of Baylor University, the world’s largest Baptist institution of higher learning for a decade. According to President Neff, “Education is an investment that builds up the state. Ignorance is a canker that destroys it.” Of Christian education Neff noted that “it is the one thing that gives both to the home and church their growth and glory, and without which they would soon dry up and blow away.” These statements exemplify the connection of Progressive rhetoric toward education and Christian values that is typical of southern Progressives. To strengthen the connection, Neff ended the speech with a quote of Woodrow Wilson, who likened denominational schools to “Lighthouses to make plain the pathways of men.”9

On another “Baptist Hour” show airing in February 1943, Neff took on the topic of the postwar world in a speech entitled “Christian Patriots in a Chaotic World.” Neff said, “Now, we are engaged in….an earth-wide war….It is being waged by the allied armies for the freedom of

---


all mankind, without regard to race, rank or religion, without regard to color, creed or code. When this war is over we will have a chaotic world.” Neff then offered a solution to counter the chaos ahead. He said, “The law is the foundation of civilization….We have no law-making body on this globe today with the power to make laws for the government of the nations of the world.” Here, once again, Neff invoked the memory of Woodrow Wilson as he spoke in favor of a new body to replace the failed League of Nations. Neff warned, “We won the last war, but lost the peace forever. We refused to join the League of Nations. We scorned the world court. The clock of destiny struck, and we were so busy with radios, automobiles, gadgets…and partisan politics, we heard it not. Let us not default the second time.” These statements reflect the realities of someone, like Neff, having experienced fifty years of American history in leadership roles along with the disappointment of what could have been. In any case, they reflect the long-term ideals and values of a Progressive.10

In March of 1945, the closing days of the war in Europe, Neff again spoke on “The Baptist Hour.” This time, his topic was “Christian Patriots Facing the Future.” Understandably, one of the speaker’s main themes was maintaining the peace after the war was won. Neff said, “our soldier boys are fighting and dying in order that the warring world of today may build a peaceful world for tomorrow….This new world of tomorrow, if it is to be a worthwhile one, must be built on the eternal foundations of religion, education, and democracy.” Another major theme of the speech was human rights, or as Neff called it, “man’s inalienable rights.” Though the former governor mentioned free speech and voting rights, a major focus was naturally, religious freedom. Neff stated, “There can be no freedom…of thought or action of any kind if religious freedom is not guaranteed….At the peace table, let it be announced…that the religion

---

10Pat Neff, “Christian Patriots in a Chaotic World,” Radio speech transcript, February 28, 1943, AR695 Box 1, Baptist Hour Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archive, Nashville, Tennessee.
of every cult and creed for all people must be voluntary and free.” Neff also took on the topic of self-government and race noting, “No one race should assume to enforce any type of government on another race. There is no super race.” Clearly, the “world of tomorrow” that Neff envisaged provided free speech and religion as well as self-determination and racial tolerance. Progressives championed all of these ideas, one in particular, the self-determination of peoples, was all but invented by Wilson.11

In “Christian Patriots Facing the Future,” the influences of evangelical Christianity are also evident. Neff said, “Christian citizens everywhere must assume full responsibility in the making of a new world of tomorrow.” He added, “Our government from the very beginning has been closely linked with Christianity. Democracy is the child of Christianity….Therefore, in the building of this new world…let preachers and teachers and Christian citizens, feel their full responsibility in the making of a new civilization.” Neff also reassured his listeners that “church and state must forever remain separate….The government must never force religion, and religion must never coerce the government.” Referring again to the need to win the peace, Neff said, “God…has given America another chance to make good in her divine mission to civilize, evangelize, and Christianize the human race.” The confluence of political and religious ideas is quite interesting. Neff had no problems with using Christianity to promote democracy, and democracy to promote Christianity—all while invoking the constitutional separation of church and state. The implication seems to be that, in the search for Neff’s “world of tomorrow,” Americans could and should proselytize for Lady Liberty just as they would for Christ.12

11Pat Neff, “Christian Patriots Facing the Future,” Radio speech transcript, March 25, 1945, AR695 Box 1, Baptist Hour Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archive, Nashville, TN.
12Ibid.
Under Neff’s leadership, the SBC also worked directly in the interest of building a better postwar world. In December of 1943, the Joint Conference Committee on Public Relations, a joint committee of both the southern and northern Baptist conventions, commended President Roosevelt for his famous “Four Freedoms” speech. Those freedoms of speech and religion, along with the freedoms from fear and want, became the basis for American involvement in the Second World War, and later, the Cold War. The letter asserted that Baptists were “profoundly interested” in the “realms of conscience and religion.” The letter continued, “we endorse and applaud your proclamation of these freedoms, and assure you of our enthusiastic support of your endeavor to establish freedom of speech, of expression, and of religion in all the world.” The letter concluded, “Believing religious liberty to be a not only inalienable human right but and indispensable to human welfare, a Baptist must exercise himself to the utmost in the maintenance of absolute religious liberty for his Jewish neighbor, his Catholic neighbor, his protestant neighbor, and everybody else.” The text of the communication was entered into the meeting minutes of the SBC executive committee on which Neff naturally held a spot. It is important to note the similarities and consistencies of the letter to Roosevelt and Neff’s radio speeches. The security of religious freedom over the long-term, at home and abroad, was of the utmost importance to Neff and the SBC as the United States transitioned from wartime to a new peaceful world.13

In March 1944, the SBC’s executive committee refined its position on human rights in the postwar world. The committee reiterated its previous positions on freedom of worship and conscience, support for a new international organization to prevent war, and the idea of self determination. In the latter, the committee supported the rights of “nations both great and small”

---

13Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, Meeting Minutes, December 15, 1943, Executive Committee Records, AR.627-1, Box 69, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archive, Nashville, Tennessee.
and “racial minorities and underprivileged peoples” to self-government. The committee also added new positions pertinent to the postwar world. These included a “condemnation” of isolationism that read, “No nation is justified in seeking to separate itself from the rest of the world.” In a time when the phrase “third world” had yet to be invented, the committee also noted the problems of poverty and economic underdevelopment in poor countries. According to the committee, “The erection of tariff barriers for the enrichment of stronger nations may be as serious a hurt…as military invasion.” On the issue of race the committee stated strongly, “we deplore race prejudices and hatreds as undermining the respect of the individual and destroying…good will.” They added, “This is true whether we consider racial tension in our own nation on in international relationships.” As America approached the Cold War and the Civil Rights Era, all of these ideas increasingly became the subjects of heated debates, these in turn led to the formulation of new national and international polices.14

The issue of race would become increasingly important in postwar America. Although Neff’s SBC radio speeches included the topics of racial prejudice and voting rights, he did so rather abstractly, within a worldwide context. The speeches did not directly address these problems then existing in the United States and particularly in his native South. Change did not come easily, and when it did, it affected all facets of American life—social, political, economic, and even, religious. Many, like the SBC’s executive committee, were ready for the change; others were not, including many Baptists. This simple truth formed the basis of an incident that occurred in 1944 at the Ridgecrest Conference Center, a Baptist retreat located in North Carolina. The incident occurred when two Nigerian missionaries, a married couple named Tanimola and Mabola Ayorinde, arrived unexpectedly at Ridgecrest. The two were

14Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, Meeting Minutes, March 15, 1944, Executive Committee Records, AR.627-1, Box 69, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archive, Nashville, Tennessee.
accompanied by another white missionary, Neale Young. The Ayorindes were fairly well-known among missionaries and were received warmly. It was at this point that the impromptu visit went awry when one of the white guests unthinkingly suggested that the Ayorindes should stay for dinner and speak afterwards. After much convincing, the African couple accepted the invitation. Unfortunately, the suggestion flew in the face of the prevailing racial customs of the region, as well as the rules of the Southern Baptist Convention, which ran Ridgecrest. Though blacks had spoken at Ridgecrest before, none had ever been allowed to dine there. The situation immediately posed a dilemma for Baptist officials including Neff who was at Ridgecrest to attend a meeting of the Baptist’s Foreign Mission Board planning postwar strategy for missionary work.15

Ironically, no one at Ridgecrest that day ever voiced active opposition to the Ayorinde’s invitation; any offense taken by their presence would have come from individuals not even present. The challenge was to avoid embarrassment to those directly involved in the situation while placating the supposed objections of those who were not. Initially Ridgecrest manager, J.M. Barnette consented to the Ayorinde’s invitation until he realized they were black. He immediately reconsidered saying, “That’s against the rules….You know I’d love to have them….But there are lots of people…..” Barnette never finished the sentence, but he did not have to. His response speaks to the racial realities of the day; some like Barnette were accepting of change while others would not or could not. Barnette then turned the question over to Neff. Neff reportedly pondered the question and replied, “I’m awfully sorry….if it’s a rule it must be

15Marjorie Moore, “Ridgecrest Dilemma,” Unpublished manuscript, William Owen Carver Collection, AR 76, Box 2, Folder 83, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archive, Nashville, Tennessee; See C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957); In the previous work, Woodward describes the extent to which Jim Crow and racism were deeply ingrained in southern society. Many accepted it as a way of life; this made change extremely difficult for those who wished to affect change. This reality was exactly the cause of the “Ridgecrest Dilemma.”
authorized by the denomination to change it.” Neff’s reported response would be consistent with his usual “rules are rules” demeanor. The SBC made the rules, and he as president, was not authorized to change them summarily. Thus, alternate arrangements were made. The Ayorindes were guests of honor at a dinner party held at a nearby lodge. Afterwards, they spoke at the Ridgecrest auditorium. With the immediate dilemma resolved, the incident passed with little apparent embarrassment—but not entirely without notice.16

A few months later, Neff received a manuscript of a prospective article about the incident from a young journalist, Marjorie Moore. In her cover letter, Moore noted Neff’s “participation” in the episode and asked to “verify the facts and to get your honest opinion of the story for publication in a denominational publication.” She had sent copies to all of the others mentioned in the story except for the Ayorindes for their reactions as well. Neff responded, “If there was any commotion anywhere, or any excitement, I was perfectly innocent of it….It is true that I met the missionaries…but I was merely introduced…in a most dignified and becoming manner and did not observe anything out of the ordinary.” On the issue of allowing the Ayorindes to dine with Ridgecrest guests, Neff wrote, “It is absurd for anyone to think that I had any authority as president to authorize who should or should not eat as guests.” Neff then stated he knew “nothing” of any rule prohibiting blacks from dining at Ridgecrest. As asked, President Neff offered one correction. He wrote that when asked what he thought about the Ayorindes’ presence, Neff replied, “I see no objection to them eating with us if it is desirable for them to do so.” As for the manuscript’s publication possibilities, Neff wrote, “I think your article is futile and fruitless….No good of any nature could be derived of your publication.” The article was

16Ibid; In all likelihood, those present at Ridgecrest for the Ayorindes’ may have been more Progressive than most Baptists. Nevertheless, many Southern Baptists clergymen were just as racist as anyone else and often played a part in perpetuating a system of inequality. This is the thesis of Shelton Smith’s, In his Image, but….Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972).
never published and Neff’s role in the episode is questionable. Neff’s reaction was typically Southern Progressive. He showed no overt racism, but was anxious not to upset the racial status-quo and probably wished the whole issue would go away. Neff’s response to Moore’s inquiry shows that he was upset or even angered, by even the appearance of racism.\textsuperscript{17}

As the Ridgecrest Dilemma was playing out, Neff was elected to a third term as president of the Southern Baptist Convention over his own objections. Just before the 1944 convention, Neff publicly declined another term believing two terms to be honor enough. Nevertheless, when the convention met in May, he was unanimously re-elected. In May of 1946, Neff ended his tenure as president and was succeeded by Dr. Louie Newton of Atlanta. Although Neff was no longer the leader of southern Baptists, he still held an important leadership role within the church as president of Baylor University. In that capacity, one of his more visible duties was the selection of recipients of honorary degrees from Baylor. Such awards brought prestige and acclaim not only to Baylor and the honorees, but also to the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) which partially funded the university and appointed one-third of its board of trustees. Through the years, Baylor conferred honorary degrees upon such notables as Vice President John Nance Garner, Senator Thomas B. Connally, Austin, Texas socialite and political operative Clara Driscoll, and Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby, wife of former Governor Bill Hobby Sr. and

\textsuperscript{17}Marjorie Moore to Neff, Undated, PNP; Neff to Marjorie Moore, October 30, 1944, PNP, Moore’s manuscript would likely have been lost had she not sent it to Dr. William Owen Carver, a retired professor of philosophy at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Carver was likely one of the individuals Moore sent the manuscript for critique. Carver’s papers are housed at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archive.; See also Morton Sosna, \textit{In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue}, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.); The Ridgecrest episode is consistent with Sosna’s findings. Many white southern liberals sought to define Southern culture on a “non-racial” basis, like those who invited the Ayorindef to dinner. Others like Neff were afraid to upset conservatives by questioning racial traditions. The net effect was that Southerners were ineffective at dealing with race issues and only federal intervention finally did.
commander of the wartime Women’s Army Corps. Generally, the degree of “Doctor of Letters” was awarded to recipients at the spring graduation and called for a speech by the honoree.  

For the most part, there was rarely any public objection to the selection of recipients. Occasionally, but very rarely, Neff received personal objections. One example of when he did was the case of Senator Connally. It seems that in the course of his graduation speech, Connally who was an ardent supporter of Roosevelt and the New Deal let his comments stray into the realm of politics. Several days after the commencement, Neff received a letter from J.B. Cranfill an old friend as well as retired minister and prominent Texas Baptist. Cranfill wrote that Connally had “turned a great occasion into political channels and acclaimed the inanities and insanities of the so-called New Deal, through which our…President and his allies are herding us straight into the socialistic and communistic camps.” Cranfill allowed that “probably you did not know what Tom was going to say” but expressed his displeasure nonetheless. Neff responded, “I am not the one this letter should have been written to because I did not write the speech. You should have written to Senator Connally.” Neff added that he told the senator that “the responsibility of making the speech was his” but suggested that the topic be “some angle of Texas history and Baylor history.” Connally had clearly not taken the suggestion but had not really done anything wrong. The episode illustrates the pitfalls Neff faced when selecting the recipients of honorary degrees and demonstrates the growing objection in the New Deal by conservatives like Cranfill.

18“Neff Heads Baptists for Third Term,” DMN, May 18, 1944; “Neff Declines Third Term as Baptist Head,” DMN, May 30 1944; “Baptists Name Dr. Newton as New President,” DMN, May 17, 1946.
19J.B. Cranfill to Neff, Letter, June 9, 1936, PNP; Neff to J.B. Cranfill, Letter, June 11, 1936, PNP; For more on the division among Texas democrats over the New Deal, see Lionel V. Patenaude, Texans, Politics, and the New Deal, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983).
In October of 1945, Senator Connally extended to President Truman an invitation to come to Baylor and receive a Doctor of Letters degree on behalf of Neff and the university. The President “highly appreciated” the honor and accepted the invitation with a tentative visit to Baylor set for December 5. Truman, who was well-known for his card playing and occasional drinking regarded himself as a “reasonably good Baptist,” but more conservative members of his faith were not as charitable in their assessments. Neff publicly announced conferment of the honor, as well as the President’s upcoming visit, in a morning chapel service on October 26. The decision drew immediate criticism both public and private. Within a month of the announcement, the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) criticized the president’s drinking and gambling. Furthermore, and somewhat ominously for Neff, the convention instructed that Baptist institutions in the state should not confer honorary degrees on people like Truman. When told of the decision by reporters, Neff replied, “No comment.” A few days later, Neff clarified, “The Baptist General Convention does not grant honorary degrees at Baylor nor does it select persons to whom degrees will be granted.” Neff’s rebuff was thus emphatic; there was little room for compromise.²⁰

Not all Baptists agreed with the Texas convention and Neff received considerable support especially from those who counted most. Before rebuffing the BGCT, Neff had already consulted with the Baylor Board of Trustees. In it’s meeting of November 16, 1945, the board was read a letter by President Neff in which he wrote, I am desirous that the Baylor University Board of Trustees, the Waco unit, advise me as to what I should do in regard to conferring of this degree in order that I may notify Mr. Truman as to the attitude of the institution at this time.”

Neff then recapped the events to that point and turned the matter to the board. One board member expressed concern over the university’s relationship with the BGCT and suggested its wishes should be respected. Another board member, Alva Bryan, countered that the Truman degree “would be an honor to both the university and the denomination.” Bryan added that, “He felt that resolutions could not legally be retroactive unless voted so and this invitation had already been extended.” Several other members expressed the opinion that Truman’s degree should be conferred. After a “lengthy discussion” a motion was made and accepted to confer the degree. Neff thus had the support he needed to proceed.  

Shortly after making the initial tentative date, President Truman canceled all of his appearances outside of Washington because of “governmental duties incident to both peace and war.” Neff assured the President that he could collect the degree at his convenience. There the matter stood for over a year. Finally, Neff received a phone call from Truman’s private secretary who informed him that the president would be in Waco on March 6, 1947 to receive his degree. The visit would come as part of a five-day trip to Mexico aimed at maintaining friendly relations and facilitating trade. The trip, postponed because of the many economic and foreign policy challenges of the immediate postwar world came just one year after Winston Churchill’s famous “Iron Curtain” speech and just three months prior to the announcement of the Marshall Plan. Truman was scheduled to give speeches in Mexico City, as well as one in Waco. Any speech given by the American president was important, especially in the political climate of the day. As March 6 approached, the world waited to hear the president’s words, and Wacoans waited excitedly for his visit to their city.

---

21 Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees—Waco Executive Committee—Minutes. 1933-1957. November 16, 1945. Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Secret Service agents began preparations for the president’s visit days in advance. Security arrangements called for some 300 troops from Fort Hood as well as police officers from Waco, Dallas, Mexia, and Temple. One hundred fifty thousand Texans were expected to line Truman’s parade route. Many important Texans were expected to greet the president including, Senator Connally, Governor Beauford Jester, Representatives W.R. Poage and Hatton W. Sumners, and former governors William P. Hobby and Dan Moody. In anticipation of Truman’s speech, some noted the similarities between this event and Winston Churchill’s speech at Westminster College the year before where, in addition to his receiving an honorary degree from that institution, the former British prime minister also gave the famous “Iron Curtain” speech. Truman’s speech at Baylor was expected to be “internationally important.” On the day of the visit, Texas weather was at its unpredictable spring best—cold, windy, and wet. President Truman’s plane, the “sacred cow” landed at the Waco airport and was met by Neff, Connally, and Waco Mayor Richard Bush. Governor Jester did not make it through the security cordon and was only allowed to pass on the word of the president. From the airport, a presidential motorcade traveled along a nine-mile route through downtown and to the Baylor campus.23

Once on campus, Truman was escorted to the auditorium in Waco Hall for the conferment ceremony. In awarding the honorary degree, Neff noted that it was given in recognition of “worthwhile achievement” and “honesty, industry, and economy.” Truman then received the degree and was hooded. Afterwards, the President proceeded to the podium where

---

he thanked Baylor University for the degree and started his speech. Truman began by noting, “At this particular time, the whole world is concentrating…on obtaining the objectives of peace and freedom. These objectives are bound up…with a third objective—reestablishment of world trade….peace, freedom, and world trade are inseparable.” The President then laid the case for international cooperation in pursuit of those objectives. Truman asserted, “We cannot find security in isolation…we must join other nations…to organize the world for peace.” Naturally, the organization he had in mind for that purpose was the United Nations, which had already been established to facilitate world peace and freedom. The missing element of course was trade. Thus, Truman spent a major portion of the speech arguing for the establishment of a world trade organization under the auspices of the United Nations. Negotiations to establish such an organization were set to begin in Geneva, Switzerland, one month hence. The president wanted “bipartisan” support not only for the nation’s foreign policy, but also its “foreign economic policy.”

Truman then reminded his audience of the state of world trade in the decades preceding the war. He asserted that the volleys of tariffs, embargoes, and quotas between nations only hampered world economic growth and were a “major cause” of the Great Depression. Furthermore, the president added that such policies were “economic warfare” and that in such warfare, “nobody wins.” Thus, as the world’s leading economy, the United States bore great responsibility. Truman said, “The choice is ours. We can lead the nations to economic peace or we can plunge them into economic war.” President Truman then made the case for economic peace in the postwar era. He stated, “Everywhere on earth, nations are under economic pressure.

---

24Neff, Citation of President Pat M. Neff in Connection with the Conferring of an Honorary Degree on Harry S. Truman at Baylor University, March 6, 1947, PNP; Harry S. Truman, Press release of text of Baylor speech, March 4, 1947, Box 543 (President’s Personal File #2100), Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri; The word “economic” was underlined in the text of Truman’s speech for emphasis.
Countries that were devastated by the war are seeking to reconstruct their industries.” Hinting at the need for what would become the Marshall Plan, the President also noted that those same countries would be limited in their ability to import goods, presumably made in the United States, by their inability to export due to the destruction of their industrial base. At the same time, other countries “lagged in their development” and “are seeking to industrialize.” This was an early acknowledgement of the idea that there was a “developing world,” an idea that became increasingly important in later years. Truman then expressed the fear that those countries devastated by the war, as well as those hoping to develop their economies, may turn to protectionism thus setting of another international trade war. Truman reiterated the need for a world trade organization and “freedom of enterprise.”

President Truman continued with the theme of freedom saying, “There is one thing that Americans value even more than peace, it is freedom.—freedom of worship, freedom of speech, and freedom of enterprise.” He continued, “throughout history, freedom of worship and freedom of speech have been most frequently enjoyed in those societies that have…freedom of individual enterprise….It is part and parcel of what we call American.” The apparent patriotic appeal was purely intentional as Truman stated, “Our people are united. They have come to a realization of their responsibilities. They are ready to assume their role of leadership. They are determined upon an international order in which peace and freedom shall endure.” The President concluded, “Peace and freedom are not easily achieved. They cannot be attained by force. They come from mutual understanding, from a willingness to deal fairly…in all matters—political and economic. If other nations will do the same, we can reach the goals of permanent peace and world freedom.” After completing the speech, Truman met briefly with some cousins who were

---

25Harry S. Truman, Press release of text of Baylor speech, March 4, 1947, Box 543 (President’s Personal File #2100), Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.
Waco residents before returning to the airport to fly back to Washington D.C. Truman cited “international developments” as reason for his hurried return to the capitol. Six days later, Truman delivered the “Truman Doctrine” speech before a joint session of Congress. The President’s speech at Baylor was clearly intended as an important foreign policy statement in a rapidly changing postwar world. With the honorary degree conferred, and his speech made, the consequences and significance of Truman’s trip to Waco were left to political pundits, critics, and historians.  

Today Truman’s speech at Waco is little known. The World Trade Organization, and indeed the United Nations itself, are lightly regarded by most Americans. In the long run, the speech at Waco has most likely been lost under the sheer volume of other important events and policies of the Truman era. However, within the context of the life of Pat Neff, the event and the speech are both quite important. Close comparison of the SBC’s executive committee minutes during Neff’s tenure as president and the text of Truman’s speech reveal many similarities. Peace and freedom were themes in both cases; the United Nations was seen as a guarantor of those ideals in both. Several different freedoms were identified and held in common as well. Freedom of religion was an important common theme. Most surprising is the commonality of economic freedom. It was the most important theme of Truman’s speech but was also highly visible in the SBC executive committee’s meetings. Whereas the SBC regarded trade barriers as a “serious hurt” to developing nations, Truman noted how these same nations were “seeking to industrialize.” The similarities are clear and striking as is their basis in Progressive ideals and rhetoric. Neff invited and endured great criticism in his decision to honor Truman. He could

---

26Harry S. Truman, Press release of text of Baylor speech, March 4, 1947, Box 543 (President’s Personal File #2100), Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri; “Cold Wind, Rain Met by Presidential Quip,” DMN, March 7, 1947; Truman to Neff, Letter, March 10, 1947; The Truman Doctrine speech was delivered on March 12, 1947.
easily have withdrawn the invitation to Truman, but yet he did not. Why? Neff supported Truman because he held in common with him many of the same core beliefs—the same ones Neff’s pursued as president of the Southern Baptist Convention and that Truman expressed in his speech at Waco.

In the final analysis, Neff paid a heavy price for going through with conferring Truman’s degree. Though the decision received the support of the Baylor Board of Trustees, it sorely tested the patience of many—especially the BGCT. Conservative Baptists, Texas Regulars, Baylor supporters, and others all grew weary of Neff. Within months of Truman’s visit, tensions between Neff and his detractors were high. The annual meeting of the BGCT convened in early November of 1947. One of the more important items on the convention’s agenda was the appointment of twelve of thirty-six members of the Baylor Board of Trustees. Of the twelve outgoing members, most were friends of Neff and four were key supporters. The latter included: Alva Bryan who had supported Neff during the Truman controversy, Marrs McLean who had funded two buildings for Baylor, H.L. Kokernot, another important Baylor benefactor, and finally former Governor Dan Moody an old friend. Neff likely saw the handwriting on the wall. A few days prior to BGCT meeting, Neff announced his retirement as president of Baylor University effective December 31, 1947. He had served the university for fifteen years and was set to retire at the age of seventy-six. After the announcement, Neff told reporters, “I’m not mad at anybody, and nobody is mad at me.” When asked to comment, J. Howard Williams, secretary of BGCT said, that Neff’s retirement was “entirely voluntary” and went on to praise his work. With that, the last words of the last chapter of Neff’s tenure at Baylor had seemingly been written.27

Although Neff’s last days at Baylor were now at hand, in truth they had been coming for some time. The combination of twelve years on the job, a penchant for heavy-handedness, and a hint of capriciousness all conspired to arouse resentment among Baylor students, alumnae, faculty, staff, and trustees. In February of 1946, A.P. Hamrick, Baylor alumnus and pastor of the First Baptist Church of Teague, Texas, wrote to J.M. Dawson, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Waco and Baylor trustee. Dawson was Neff’s minister and an opponent of the Truman degree. Hamrick began, “There are so many complaints I hardly know where to begin. The criticism comes from prominent Texas pastors and Baylor students.” According to Hamrick, students objected to Neff’s calling them “children” and “two-bit students” from the lectern during morning chapel service and of his lecturing them on behavior during prayers. Reverend Hamrick also criticized Neff’s rigid expulsion policy. Hamrick quoted one “prominent” Texas pastor, whom he did not name, as saying “Baylor needs a president who is a Christian gentleman. The man they have now is neither.” Finally, Hamrick related his experience at a Baylor-SMU football game when he overheard a man say, “There goes Pat, as big a politician as ever.” To which another man exclaimed “Hooray for Truman!” Hamrick hung his head in shame.28

A few weeks later, having not gotten the desired response, Hamrick again wrote Dawson. Hamrick began, “I heard more criticism of the president in one hour as a visitor on campus last fall than I heard in three years as a student while Dr. Brooks was president.” Hamrick also visited with university administrators one of whom said, “for six or eight years, Mr. Neff did well—seemed to be God’s man for the place—but for three or four years things are very different.” Hamrick told Dawson he had talked with ministers of four large churches in the state,

28A.P. Hamrick to J.M. Dawson, February 20, 1946, PNP.
as well as “several” others at the recent BGCT meeting all of whom had concerns similar to his own. Finally, Hamrick even questioned Neff’s attendance of Sunday school in Dawson’s own church. The correspondence between Hamrick and Dawson is representative of the situation Neff was in at the end of his tenure at Baylor. Neff had his supporters; some were stronger than others. Dawson, a member of the board of trustees, was supportive of Neff, but he had opposed him on the conferment of the honorary degree on Truman. Meanwhile, opposition to Neff came from several directions. Texas pastors and alumnae like Hamrick, disagreed with Neff’s methods. University administrators questioned Neff’s effectiveness. Students disliked the way Neff treated them, The Truman episode was merely one more grievance added to an already long list. By late 1947, the consensus was that Neff should go.29

After fifty years in public life, Neff was not one to “fade away.” His last few weeks at Baylor were filled with drama and dissention. In the days after Neff announced his impending retirement, Baylor faculty voted to implore Neff to reconsider. Neff responded that he would if the trustees wished. Two weeks later, however, Neff dropped a “bombshell” by firing Baylor’s Business Manager, Roy McKnight and the executive secretary of the alumni association, Jack Dillard. Neff cited the need to provide his successor “an open field and free hand in organizing his working staff.” The firings shocked nearly everyone; McKnight had proven himself an able administrator and Dillard was not even a university employee. When reporters asked Neff about the firings he seemed to indicate that he thought the two men were conspiring against him in some way but gave no indication of why. In reality, Neff believed the two were talking to disaffected faculty members in regards to “taking over the institution” after his retirement. The move touched off a firestorm. The “far-flung” Baylor alumni rallied around Dillard; McKnight

29A.P. Hamrick to J.M. Dawson, March 6, 1946, PNP; In the earlier letter from Hamrick to Dawson, Hamrick told Dawson he could show the letter to Neff. He apparently did; the letters appearing in Neff’s file appear to be originals.
received hundreds of telephone calls and telegrams supporting him. E.E. Townes, vice-president of the board of trustees issued the “off hand opinion” that Neff did not have the authority to fire Dillard and could not fire McKnight without the consent of trustees. Meanwhile, Baylor supporters called on trustees to accept Neff’s’ still pending resignation.30

As the Baylor University Board of Trustees met on November 28, 1947, President Pat Neff waited patiently for the outcome in the hallway outside. Neff informed reporters waiting with him that he had resubmitted his resignation. Inside, a board member read aloud Neff’s official letter of resignation. D.K. Martin moved that the resignation be accepted and J.S. Melton seconded it. The motion carried and Neff entered the room to be told the news. He emerged seven minutes later, spoke with reporters for about thirty minutes, and left before the meeting ended. In the meeting, the trustees expressed their “sincere appreciation for the excellent services of Mr. Neff.” Several trustees added their own praises to Neff and his record. After paying sufficient respects to the now former president, the trustees turned to other more pressing matters. Roy McKnight’s dismissal was overturned and he was given one month’s leave of absence to recover from a recent illness. McKnight’s leave ended conspicuously on January 1, 1948—the day after Neff left. Judge E.E. Townes, who chaired the meeting, ruled that neither the university president nor the trustees could fire Jack Dillard since the university was not paying his salary. Thus, Dillard had never been fired in the first place. With that, Baylor had effectively hit the “reset” button.31


31“Neff is ‘Stranger’ Waiting for Session,” The [Baylor] Daily Lariat, November 28, 1947; Baylor Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, November 28, 1947, Baylor University Records, Board of Trustees, General Board, 1934-1955. (Box, V. 15), Baylor University, Waco, Texas.
Neff now entered retirement. He moved his office from the Baylor campus to Waco’s Amicable Building where he had maintained a law office years before. As one would expect of a retired septuagenarian, the former governor and university president greatly reduced his public appearances. For the most part, Neff maintained a low profile. Considering those realities, along with his experiences in public and political life, it is all the more curious that two of the very few major public appearances Neff made that first year were on the campaign trail for President Truman. In 1948, Truman was in the political fight of his life. The Democratic Party was split between liberals who supported the New Deal like Truman, and conservatives who also tended to be southerners. To complicate matters further for the President, many of the latter group turned to the segregationist State’s Rights Democratic Party, also known as the “Dixiecrats,” led by Strom Thurmond. This outright split, along with strong Republican opposition, made Truman’s reelection chances seem slim. For Texans, especially Neff, these political realities were nothing new as exemplified by the movement for Hoover in 1928 and the melees of the 1940 and 1944 state conventions. For all of those reasons, Neff could easily have avoided participating; and, for all of those same reasons, Truman needed all of the help he could get.32

Many Texas politicians sought to distance themselves from President Truman. The 1948 Texas political season began in April with rival camps aligning either for or against the President. The two camps met simultaneously in what was referred to as the “battle of the barbecues.” Anti-Truman forces met in Fort Worth where Governor Jester was to make “his major political speech of the year” and to “report my thinking in the field of state’s rights and to comment upon the violence…done against those rights by national headquarters of the

Democratic Party.” Of course, President Truman was the head of the party. Meanwhile, the pro-
Truman forces met at Mother Neff State Park near Macgregor. Neff delivered the welcoming
speech for the event. When asked about his presence, Neff responded, “It means absolutely
nothing other than I am making a friendly welcoming address. It doesn’t mean I am for or
against anyone.” In fact, Neff’s presence was likely more than that; Jester had issued an open
invitation to all former governors to attend the event in Fort Worth. Neff had chosen to be at
Macgregor with the Truman supporters. Perhaps, Neff was, as he suggested at the meeting,
merely being a good Democrat—or perhaps, he was voting with his feet in advance of the
election. Furthermore, Neff as a retired former governor approaching the age of eighty could
have easily attended neither event. In any case, Truman would not be the formal nominee of the
party until the Democratic National Convention in July. 33

Once nominated, Truman who had only succeeded to the presidency worked diligently to
win it in his own right and pursued a grueling “whistle-stop” tour across the country aboard his
train, the “Magellan.” In September, the campaign toured Texas. Shortly before the visit, the
Democratic National Committee announced the President’s itinerary as well as the dignitaries
meeting the train at each station. The Magellan was scheduled to cross the state from El Paso to
Denison with stops in between. Neff was to be among those appearing with Truman in Waco.
When the date arrived, Neff boarded the campaign train in Temple and rode with the president to
Waco. There, Congressman Bob Poage, who represented Waco, spoke to the crowd first after
which the platform was turned to Neff who was on crutches after a recent fall. It was Neff,
former governor, former president of Baylor University, and now retired, who was given the
honor of introducing President Truman. The President “lambasted” Republicans and spoke on

33“Barbecue Factions Go All out to Attract Big Crowds Tuesday,” DMN, April 18, 1948; “Jester's Speech
Will Clarify Stand on Truman, Revolt,” DMN, April 20, 1948; “Truman Speakers Hop Band Wagon,” DMN, April
21, 1948.
behalf of Governor Jester’s reelection and the election of Congressman Lyndon Johnson to the United States Senate. Apparently any hard feelings between Jester and Truman had been repaired. At one point, Truman’s speech was drowned out by a train whistle. Truman commented, “I guess there are so many people on the tracks over there the engineer can’t get through.” Neff retorted, “Must be a Republican engineer.” It was his last major political appearance. Neff stood up for a fellow Progressive, President Truman, when he needed it most. In the fall elections, Truman carried Texas and against considerable odds, was elected to the presidency.34

In later years, Neff’s public appearances were rare but he maintained contacts with Texas politicians. Neff had always had a warm relationship with Lyndon Johnson going back to the latter’s days as NYA director in Texas. Johnson had idolized Neff in his youth, tried to emulate his as a public speaker, occasionally sought his political advice, and never forgot him. In 1949, Senator Johnson wrote Neff what could only have been a heartening letter to an old, battered politico. Johnson mentioned that he had been lunching with Kentucky Senator Garrett Whithers and the two had discussed “the great state of Texas and the men who have contributed to it.” He added that Whithers had “said some wonderful things about you.” Johnson had also promised the Kentuckian a copy of The Battles of Peace and asked Neff for a copy since it was out of print. There is no record of a reply, but Neff would no doubt have appreciated the sentiment. In early 1950 Johnson stopped by Waco to pay Neff a visit. After returning to Washington, the senator again wrote Neff, “I just want you to know how much pleasure I derived from getting to see and visit with you….I wish we could have talked longer, and I hope that the next time I am

down that way we will do so.” The two men had close ties, and Neff was clearly highly influential on the future President Johnson.\footnote{Lyndon Johnson to Neff, April 14, 1949, PNP; Lyndon Johnson to Neff, February 14, 1949, PNP.}

As was his policy, Neff never gave unsolicited political advice, but when asked, he was always happy to oblige. Shortly before his gubernatorial nomination, Beauford Jester sent Neff a copy of his platform and asked for his “comments.” A few days later, Neff replied that Jester’s platform was, “splendid, comprehensive, and forward looking.” Letting his old Progressive roots show, Neff added, “Your platform in regard to conservation is good. I do not think you can over emphasize the importance of conserving our oil, gas, soil, forest, and in fact, all of our natural resources.” The one piece of advice that the former governor offered the future governor was to mention conservation more. Upon his election, Jester asked for his predecessor’s “advice and consul” before taking office. In reply, Neff congratulated the governor-elect and suggested that Jester should remember who his friends were and to reward them in his nominations. He reasoned that a governor needed friends in key places in government to enact his program. He noted, “I would commence now in making my administration a Jester administration.” In the first letter, Neff was championing a cause near his heart, conservation. In the second letter, Neff was offering friendly advice that was also based in the old Progressive idea of good, effective government. As Neff approached the end of his lifetime, the Progressive ideals that had been with him for a half century were still strong.\footnote{Jester to Neff, March 5, 1946, PNP; Neff to Jester, March 9, 1946, PNP; Jester to Neff, December 20, 1946, PNP; Neff to Jester, January 7, 1947, PNP.}

On the morning of Sunday, January 20, 1952, Pat Neff missed church. Parishioners at the First Baptist Church of Waco would have readily noticed the empty pew. Neff had passed away at approximately 8:30 that morning of an apparent heart attack. At about that time, his
wife heard a groan and called the family physician. Neff was gone before the doctor arrived. Governor Alan Shivers’ office released a press statement that likely would have pleased Neff. It read: “Pat Neff’s name has long been synonymous with Christian service in governmental, educational, and civic life. His course has always been one of firm courage and high purpose. Texas has lost not only a revered elder statesman, but also a notable symbol of integrity in the conduct of public affairs.” The funeral occurred four days later and was attended by Governor Shivers, Senator Connally, and other notables. Neff’s pastor, Reverend Forest Feezor, conducted the funeral service and read the Bible passage the former governor regarded as his favorite. Feezor read, “I am now reckoned to thee, Father, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course and kept the good faith.” Many Texans remembered Neff fondly. Cap King of Bronson, Texas wrote editors of the *Dallas Morning News* stating, “His high religious standard and personal example of pure moral character were to be deeply appreciated….His personality of pure loyalty to our country and his unexcelled…oratory brought tears to his listeners.”

Pat M. Neff is buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Waco and has a modest monument there. Nevertheless, this lifelong Southern Progressive has many monuments: the many state parks one of which bears his family name, the many lakes that quench the thirsts of and provide playgrounds for Texans, and the large prosperous cities made possible by those lakes. Neff was a hero and inspiration to President Lyndon Johnson who used his words to teach debate to Mexican-American students in Cotulla, Texas as a young man. Johnson thought of those former students many years later as he signed the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts; perhaps he thought of Neff as well. Pat Neff Hall stands at the center of the Baylor University campus in

---

Waco and is a monument not just to Neff but also to fifty years of Progressive commitment to higher education. Without Neff’s efficiency and ingenuity, as well as his introduction of modern business practices, Baylor may never have survived the Great Depression let alone become the institution it is today. It is important to remember that Neff used New Deal programs, the ultimate expression of Progressivism, as the basis for saving his beloved university. Neff’s last political act was in support of another Progressive, President Harry Truman. Neff has many monuments and one need not look far in Texas to find them.
CHAPTER 14

CONCLUSION

I live for those who Love me.
For those who know me best.
For the heaven that bends above us,
and awaits my spirit too.
For the rights that need assistance;
For the wrongs that need resistance;
For the things that are in the distance;
and the good that I can do.

--George L. Banks

In Pat Neff’s personal papers, there appears a letter from the governor to Herbert Spencer, a supporter from San Antonio. Spencer had apparently heard Neff’s recitation of the poem above and requested a copy of it. Neff complied. The poem reflects the tenets of the Progressive movement as well as embodies the spirituality of the man. These are the ideals that Neff worked for all of his life; their relative simplicity belies the complicated nature of the man. The episode with Truman caused a falling out between Neff and both Alva Bryan and D.K. “Doc” Martin that ended their friendships of many years standing. Shortly after the episode, Neff wrote Bryan a long, heart-felt letter. He acknowledged, “I have never had but few close friends….There has not been a time…that I would not have included you in a small group of choicest [sic] and highly appreciated friends.” This solitary nature combined with Neff’s habit of keeping his thoughts to himself made him a difficult man to get to know well. Obviously, few knew him well, and even those who did, such as Bryan and Martin, did not have a clear perception of him. Martin had actively tried to get Neff to turn against both Roosevelt and Truman. Bryan did not approve of Truman as a Baptist. Both seemed to assume that Neff held similar views to them and were taken aback by his later support of Truman. Under such
circumstances, and in lieu of some political or other manifesto, historians are left with but little
to judge save a man’s hopes, dreams, and achievements.1

Neff was very much a product of his political place and time. Born in 1871, in the
middle of Reconstruction, he grew up, matured, and prospered; his native Texas did much the
same as it transitioned from Old South to New South. Just as the proponents of the ideal of the
New South suggested, education was the key to Neff’s success. Nearby Baylor University
provided easy access to higher education. Neff maintained a close relationship with Baylor
throughout his life and he never forgot the value of a good education. A law degree from the
University of Texas provided a springboard into the world of power and influence. Attorneys
like Neff, as well as businessmen, and other urban professionals provided the leading cadre of
the New South movement. Neff spent almost all of his life in and around Waco, Texas—
understanding the place is crucial to understanding the man. The Waco of Neff’s youth was a
complicated combination of the conservative and the Progressive. The city was the home of the
largest Baptist university in the world. Yet, it took pride at the completion of the Amicable
Insurance Building in 1912, a 22-story office building that symbolized Waco’s rise as a New
South city. This duality was reflected in Neff’s own personality. On moral or religious issues,
he was quite conservative. On economic and some social issues, he was quite Progressive. This
mix of conservatism and Progressivism was typical of southern Progressivism.

After law school, Neff returned to Waco where he started a law practice and was elected
state representative soon thereafter. Neff entered politics at a crucial time—just after the
collapse of the Populist Revolt. Throughout his lifetime Texas politics were volatile; the Texas
Democratic Party was frequently divided and beset by infighting. When thousands of farmers
left the party for the Populists in the 1890s, it constituted the greatest threat to Democratic
control of the state. Neff, a loyal Democrat, was instrumental in limiting the threat of such
insurgency when as a legislator and Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives, he

1Neff to Herbert Spencer, June 6, 1921, PNP; Neff to Alva Bryan, November 19, 1947, PNP.
shepherded legislation that disfranchised the poor white farmers that had left the party. The
mandatory poll tax and the Terrell election laws governed the state for years to come. These
laws also ensured that political discourse in Texas would be left to those who could afford it and
limited to the confines of the Democratic Party. For the rest of Neff’s life, the party constituted
an umbrella organization under which all politics, whether conservative or liberal, operated.

After leaving the legislature, Neff took time out from statewide politics to raise a family.
His political aspirations were restricted to McLennan County where he served in the county
attorney’s office. By the late teens, Neff’s children were nearly grown and the appeal of politics
grew. As a Progressive, and a Baptist, the prohibition movement was an important one to Neff.
In many ways, Neff was the prototypical Progressive/Prohibitionist, believing alcohol to be a
root cause of social ills and disorder throughout his life. In 1917, he led a campaign to ban
alcohol in the city of Waco. The successful campaign drew state and national attention toward
Neff. It also whetted his appetite, and renewed his interest, in statewide politics. During 1918
and 1919, Neff worked for the national prohibition amendment to the Constitution but not for
woman suffrage. Neff’s political activities during 1917-1919 served as a springboard to the
governor’s office.

By 1920, prohibition was the law of the land and Neff became the first governor of Texas
elected with women’s votes. His election was the culmination of three years of bitter infighting
between the conservative and Progressive wings of the Texas Democratic Party. During the late
1910s, Texas Progressives successfully impeached Jim Ferguson and endorsed both the
prohibition and woman suffrage amendments to the Constitution over the opposition of
conservatives. The 1920 gubernatorial election constituted a showdown between the two wings
of the party with Neff leading the Progressives, and former Senator Joseph Weldon Bailey
leading the conservatives. In all likelihood, Bailey’s candidacy was doomed with the advent of
woman suffrage which he had bitterly opposed. Neff was able to defeat the other Progressive candidates by carefully avoiding controversial issues and appealing to social conservatives.

Neff’s victory marked the coming of age of more liberal, more Progressive, political thought in Texas. From that moment on, Texas reformers, from Progressives to New Dealers, were less likely to allow reforms to be cherry-picked and co-opted as it had been during previous eras, and more likely to take on conservatives directly. With conservatives no longer holding sway in state politics, political debate and division was guaranteed for years to come.

Events in Texas were not isolated; they were part of a southern and national trend. When Neff entered the governor’s office in 1921, conservative resistance to modernity was best exemplified by the rise of the second Ku Klux Klan. The Klan grew rapidly in the late teens and arrived in Texas about the time of Neff’s election. Racial, social, political, and labor unrest were all by-products of modernity and the resistance to it. The Klan played a substantial roll in raising the unrest but was not responsible for it—it merely played upon these already present and acute tensions. Governor Neff faced one of the most challenging political and social environments of any Texas governor. Lynching, kidnapping, strikes, and general disorder (which the governor referred to as “lawlessness”) reigned across the state. Events such as these occurred frequently and often moved so quickly they were beyond the governor’s control. This phenomenon triggered Neff’s Progressive search for order; he sought to impose order wherever and whenever he could using any means at his disposal. Sending Texas Rangers and national guardsman to trouble spots was common. Invocation of the “Open Port” law in Denison for the Railroad Shopmen’s Strike was another means the governor used to impose order. The decision is also consistent with southern Progressivism whereby Neff sided with big business, and presumably economic development, over organized labor.
During Neff’s first term, the Klan became a political power in and of itself. Privately, Neff regarded the Klan as an agent of disorder; publicly, he disregarded it entirely maintaining a “policy of silence.” The latter point caused confusion among both supporters and opponents of the governor. Nevertheless, Neff opposed the Klan and deliberately avoided appointing judge candidates that the organization supported. Meanwhile, in 1922 as he himself ran for re-election, he avoided any public association with the Klan. In 1924, Neff also avoided association with the Klan-supported candidate for Senate, Earle Mayfield. Conversely, Neff never publicly denounced the Klan or corrected assertions by others that he supported it. In the short term, Neff’s attitude toward the Klan was politically expedient. In the long term, it cast a shadow on his reputation and likely contributed to his loss of support from Senator Mayfield in his quest for re-nomination to the National Railroad Labor Board in 1929. In Governor Neff’s second term, he returned to Progressive ideals and aimed for the future. In 1924, Neff flirted with national politics. William Jennings Bryan suggested Neff as presidential candidate; Al Smith may well have considered him for the vice-presidency. Neff’s alienation of many of his would-be Texas supporters nixed any possibility, but the episode is an indication of Texas’ increasing importance in national politics. During his last term, Governor Neff focused on a Progressive agenda of improvements to education, founding and building the state park system, and the conservation of water resources.

In subsequent years, Neff became known as the “father” of the conservation movement in Texas. Today, he could easily be considered one of the state’s first environmentalists. As a member of the Texas Railroad Commission, Neff fought the waste of oil and gas by the drilling industry. In fact, Neff’s opposition was so bitter that it was a major contribution to his alienation from the other two members of the commission and later resignation. As a member of the Texas
Parks Board, Neff sought not only to provide recreation for Texans, but also to preserve the state’s natural beauty. Water conservation is Neff’s greatest contribution to Texas. The state’s climate, ranging from semi-arid to subtropical, meant that during Neff’s youth, Texas rivers either ran dry or ran rampant. Either there was too little rain, or too much. In the latter instance, flooding led to soil erosion, and the waters drained uselessly into the Gulf of Mexico—leaving the state dry once more. As governor, Neff commissioned a study that identified Texas water resources and signed legislation that provided for the conservation of them. Some fifteen years later, Neff leant his name and influence to successful efforts to strengthen and clarify water conservation laws. These efforts meant that when Texas needed water for population and economic growth, it had it or knew where to get it. In the long term, Neff’s conservation efforts contributed greatly to the state’s growth and economic development and are the best example of his southern Progressive philosophy.

After Neff resigned from the Railroad Commission, he left elective politics. In fact, his post-gubernatorial political endeavors had disenchanted him so that he made a conscious effort to limit political engagement. Initially, saving Baylor University from the deepening Depression drew most of Neff’s attention. By clever use of National Youth Administration funding, Neff was able to maintain enrollment and cut overhead by employing student workers in a variety of positions. When the Second World War started, Neff secured government contracts and acquired surplus government equipment to grow the university. When the job of running Baylor began to outstretch his abilities, Neff hired an experienced professional, Roy McKnight, to do the job. Financially strapped Baylor could easily have not survived the Depression. Neff made sure that it did and set it up to thrive in the postwar era. Neff’s commitment to education,
efficient administration, and his willingness to take advantage of New Deal programs are also indicative of his southern Progressive philosophy.

Neff led the Southern Baptist Convention at a turning point in American history. The United States was in the midst of the Second World War. In this war, Americans were determined to not only win the war, but to win the peace as well. Few doubted that the country would emerge from the war powerful militarily, but many feared it would have to fight again. In speaking to Baptists about the postwar world, Neff often invoked Progressive rhetoric. Noting the failures of the League of Nations, Neff argued for the establishment of the United Nations and American participation in it to maintain the peace this time. Meanwhile, Neff preached forgiveness and Christian brotherhood in support of war relief. The end of the war also marked the beginning of the civil rights movement in the United States. Ending a culture of racism and discrimination would be difficult and embarrassing for the nation as a whole. The “Ridgecrest Dilemma” clearly illustrates this point. Many within the SBC thought the time had come to end racism and discrimination within the organization, others did not. Still others, like Neff, were placed in the middle. Changing what was not just a policy, but a volatile and deeply ingrained tradition, was difficult. Neff’s unwillingness to challenge racial traditions was typical of southern Progressives. In a few short years, changing policies and laws at the national, state, and local levels, in the name of civil rights proved even more challenging.

The convergence of politics and southern evangelical religion is evident in the final chapter of Neff’s career. In later years, he had largely avoided participation in political affairs unless specifically asked. The most notable example of this is Neff’s role in the Texas Democratic Convention of 1940 in Waco. The convention was a melee, a struggle between Texas Regulars (conservatives) and New Dealers (liberal-Progressives) and Neff was the only
one who could get it under control. Neff’s dual, conservative yet Progressive, nature probably made that possible. It also confused people—even his friends. When Neff selected a self-acknowledged back-slider, President Truman as the recipient of an honorary doctorate from Baylor, it took many by surprise and offended many others. Religious conservatives were chief among them. This included old friends and associates at Baylor, at the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and at the Southern Baptist Convention, all organizations that Neff had led. Neff overcame the opposition but it so damaged his reputation and standing that it was a major underlying factor in his subsequent resignation. The episode was not the first time that religious conservatives engaged in the politicization of moral issues, but it became an increasing trend afterward.

Pat M. Neff’s achievements were great. By the time of his death in 1952, Texas had become everything the New South was supposed to be—more urban than rural, more industrial than agricultural. Neff witnessed that transformation first-hand. Neff’s water conservation efforts were crucial to making it happen; Texas would not be the state it is today without its system of artificial lakes. During his lifetime, Neff also witnessed the ebb and flow of Texas and Southern politics and was frequently in the middle of the most serious struggles between conservatives and Progressives. He played a major role in curbing the political insurgency of the Populist Revolt, but only at the cost of franchise restriction. He had led Texas Progressives to victory in the 1920 gubernatorial race against arch-conservative Bailey marking a high-point in political debate and discourse in the state. Neff also served as peacemaker between the warring wings of the Texas Democratic Party in 1940. Neff was a religious and moral man who believed in democracy and fairness and could strike a balance between all of those ideals. In the end, he
was a solitary and complicated man, sometimes conservative, and sometimes Progressive. This was his greatest strength—and his greatest weakness.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Unpublished

Baptist Hour Collection. Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archive. Nashville, Tennessee.


Neff, Pat M. Papers. Texas Collection. Baylor University. Waco, Texas.


Government Publications


Books


*Newspapers and Periodicals*

*Augusta Chronicle*

*Austin American*

*Austin Daily Statesman*

*Austin Statesman*

*Baylor [Daily] Lariat*

*Bonham News*

*Charlotte Observer*

*Cleveland Plain Dealer*

*Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegram*
Dallas Morning News
Denison Herald
El Imparcial de Texas
Epoco
Evolucion
Fort Worth Star-Telegram
Houston Chronicle
Houston Informer
Kansas City Plaindealer
New Orleans Times-Picayune
La Prensa
San Antonio Express
Southern Mercury
Southwestern Railway Journal
The [Baylor] Daily Lariat
The Woman Citizen
The Woman Patriot
Time Magazine
Waco Daily News
Waco Daily Times Herald
Waco Times Herald
Secondary Sources

*Online Sources*

*Handbook of Texas Online.* <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online>


*Texas Almanac Online.* <http://www.texasalmanac.com/>

*Texas Parks and Wildlife.* <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us>

*The Portal to Texas History.* <texashistory.unt.edu/>

*Books*


**Articles**


**Theses**


**Unpublished Paper**