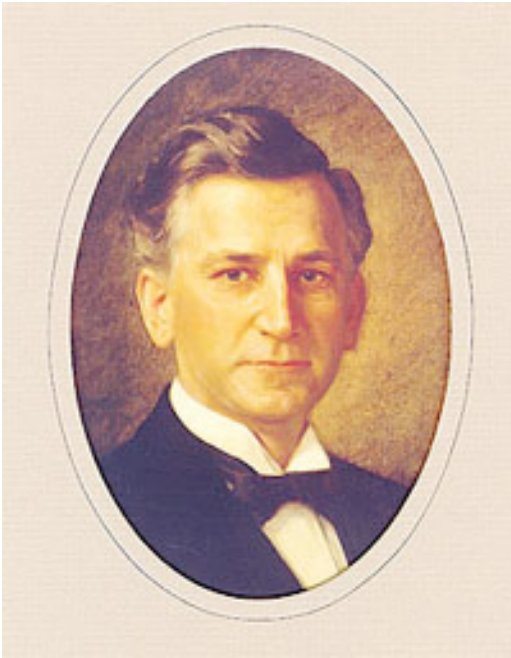


Famous Pythians of the Past



Pat Neff

Governor of Texas 1921—1925

President of Baylor University 1932—1947

Texas Grand Chancellor, Knights of Pythias 1918—1919

Pat Neff was born on November 26, 1871 to Noah and Isabella Neff in Eagle Springs, Texas. Like many young people of his generation, he experienced many hardships, not least among them watching a sibling die a slow death due to Typhoid fever, the death of his father at age 11, and many hot summers and cold winters that claimed livestock and crops.

Neff earned a Bachelor's degree from Baylor University and a law degree from the University of Texas. He was elected to the Texas legislature in 1899, less than two years after his graduation. Neff eventually rose to Speaker of the House. When his term limits expired, Neff returned to law practice and began a career as a highly sought after speaker. He did this until he began campaigning for governor.

Neff biographers Blodgett and Scott note that Pat was a very popular speaker among the Knights of Pythias lodges in Texas,

“Neff began making speeches statewide for the Pythians as early as 1898. He steadily worked his way up the ladder, and on May 14, 1918, at the annual meeting in Fort Worth, he was elected to the organization's highest state position—the grand chancellorship. The organization had been losing membership for the past seven years, but Neff was undaunted. Writing both “official Communiques” from his office

and articles in the Pythian's two organs, his enthusiasm captured the members' imagination. By the spring of 1919, in spite of more than 1,200 of their number being called to war service, a crippling influenza epidemic, and a severe drought in West Texas and the Panhandle, Neff reported that Pythian membership was up by eighty-three members. Little wonder then that the *Grand Lodge Newsletter* called for Neff's reelection, a virtually unheard-of move. Neff had put the Pythians back on stage as the third-largest fraternal organization in Texas and started them on the road to the largest membership in their history—30,507 in 1922. Despite calls that he serve an unprecedented second term, he stepped down in May 1919. He left having made a significant impact, and he was pleased with his contributions. One source of particular pride was the Pythian Children's Home in Weatherford, where more than 100 children of deceased Pythians lived."

At the most recent Grand Lodge held June 11—13, 2010, Supreme Representative George Fox recalled that Neff was very active in his Waco lodge well into his eighties. He specifically remembered Neff taking much pride and passion while participating in rank work, the initiation ritual of the Pythians.

Neff has relatives in the Pythians today. Past Chancellor Commander of Texas No. 1, Houston Lodge, Jason Shepherd is a relative of Pat Neff. Jason's great-grandfather was the brother of Neff's mother, Isabella.

For Further Reading:

The Land, the Law, and the Lord: The Life of Pat Neff by Dorothy Blodgett, Terrell Blodgett, and David L. Scott (Austin: Home Place Publishers, 2007).