

Marshall Formby

Marshall Formby remembered as a public servant, attorney, author, newsman, veteran, churchman. These words all describe one of Plainview's most distinguished citizens. Marshall Formby is perhaps best known for his service on the Texas Highway Commission from 1953 to 1959, including its chairmanship from 1957 to 1959. During his tenure he visited 251 of the state's 254 counties. He was a staunch believer in good roads and highways in general and four-lane divided roads in particular, and he made sure that his adopted homeland, the Texas Panhandle, had its share of them.

Marshall Clinton Formby, Jr. was born in 1911, in the same house in which his father was born, in the Bethel community of Hopkins County in East Texas. As a boy, he moved with his family to McAdoo (Dickens County), where he had most of his schooling before he graduated from Spur High School. He went to Texas Tech, edited the school newspaper *The Toreador*, and graduated in 1932. After farming and running a drugstore in McAdoo, he was elected Dickens County Judge in 1936 at the age of 25. Four years later, he was elected to the 30th District of the Texas State Senate, a district that included Plainview, Lubbock, and Big Spring.

Formby served for four years in World War II, including 20 months with the U.S. Army Engineers in Europe, rising to the rank of captain. After the war he earned a master's degree in journalism at the University of Texas and later operated the Plainview *Tribune*, a weekly newspaper.

A graduate of Baylor Law School in 1951, he was a partner for many years in the law firm that still bears his name and is now LaFont, Formby, Hamilton, LaFont, and Hamilton. He also operated the Aspermont *Star*, another local paper, and had interests in radio stations in Floydada, Tulia, Hereford, Seminole, Levelland, and Andrews.

After leaving the Highway Commission, Formby ran for governor in 1962. He later served on the state's College Coordinating Board, was a Texas Tech regent from 1967 to 1971, served on the Texas Tech Foundation Board, and was president of the Texas Tech Ex-Students Association. The auditorium at the Southwest Collection on the Texas Tech campus, where his papers are housed, is named in his honor. He also sat on the boards of the Panhandle Heritage Foundation, where he was one of six original board members, the Central Plains Regional Hospital, and the Plainview YMCA.

Formby chaired the University of Texas Journalism School Advisory Council, was a deacon at the First Baptist Church, held a lifetime membership on the Advisory Council of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, and served on the public relations board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. An active Rotarian, he served as a district governor in the organization. He was also a Mason and a Shriner. Over his long and distinguished career, Formby received many honors, including being named Plainview's Man of the Year in 1974. In 1962 he published a book of memoirs and reflections on West Texas called *These Are My People*.

He and his wife, the former Sharleen Wells of Barberton, Ohio, had two children and two grandchildren. Formby died in 1984.

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