

Rollin Joe Windrow

Chief Highway Engineer, Texas Highway Department

May 20, 1919 - February 5, 1922

Rollin Joe Windrow is credited with trying to move a young Highway Department into the 20th century by pushing for highway development under the visionary leadership of two remarkable governors, William P. Hobby and Pat M. Neff.

He is also credited with laying a foundation that his successors could build on. When Windrow assumed the state engineer's job, the Texas Monthly Review and State Topics, a political journal, described him as "well prepared for what will be required of him." The respected political affairs magazine in 1919 devoted a half-page glowing news feature to him.

Born in San Saba on June 9, 1885, the son of a carpenter, Windrow attended public schools in Temple and San Angelo, graduating from San Angelo High School in 1903. He received a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Texas A&M University in 1906. After graduation from A&M, he worked on railroad projects, the Mississippi levee works for the U.S. Corps of Engineers and permanent road construction. While working for the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway in West Texas, he worked with a young engineer who had graduated from the University of Texas in 1909, Gibb Gilchrist .

Leaving the railroad business, Windrow then took a fifth year of highway construction coursework at A&M, where he also served as an instructor. He then moved to Waco, where he honed his experience as a road builder and his skills at working with government officials. "When McLennan County voted a bond issue in 1913 of \$1,75,000 for the building of permanent high ways in Road District 2, Windrow was county engineer, and it was under his direction these roads - said to be among the very best - were built ," the Texas Monthly Review and State Topics reported.

He resigned as McLennan County engineer to become Waco city engineer "after some persuasion." Although he did not have the title, he assumed the duties of Waco city manager at the same time. He left that job to enter private business.

Gov. Hobby appointed him in November 1917 to the Board of Water Engineers, serving until May 1918. The major duties of the board, established in 1913, were to approve the organization of irrigation and water supply districts, the issuance of bonds by these districts and the permits for storage and diversion of water and floodwater.

Hobby then appointed Windrow state highway engineer on May 20, 1919. The Dallas Times Herald would later credit him for laying "the foundation for the organization which has functioned efficiently through the following years." Six month after he took the state engineer's job, Windrow hired his old buddy Gilchrist, naming him San Antonio district engineer. Windrow took the World War I veteran under his wing.

The next year, gubernatorial candidate Neff waged an energetic campaign, covering 6,000 miles in his car and touring counties that had never before been visited by a candidate. The road campaign worked. Neff won the election and launched aggressive reform programs amid shifting federal legislation.

Transportation remained in the forefront of politics and economic development. Windrow's tenure was marked by a great expansion of the department's duties. In 1921 the Federal Aid Road Act was amended to offer matching federal funds to supplement state money for road building, and Texas counties applied for their share. As a result, eight field divisions (districts) were created, each with an engineer in charge. Also by 1921, the department under Windrow's direction comprised of four divisions:

- Administrative, consisting of the commission, the chief engineer, clerical, bookkeeping and auditing sections.
- Registration, responsible for issuing and recording all licenses and motor vehicle numbers.
- Engineering, overseeing maintenance, materials and testing, bridges, drafting and fieldwork.
- Federal equipment, supervising the use and distribution of federal surplus items (mostly from World War I).

Windrow announced his resignation in December 1921 from the Highway Department on February 12, 1922, to work as a consulting engineer for the Missouri state highway commission. There he organized the department for its statewide bond issue and construction work.

In 1923, he became vice president of Smith Brothers Inc. contractors, Dallas. From 1928 until his death, he was president of Dallas Washed & Screened Gravel Co. and vice president of Dallas Transportation Co.

Windrow maintained an active contracting business throughout his years in Dallas. He remained an ardent Aggie, active in the Dallas A&M Club. From 1927 to 1929, he was one of the major general contractors who built Kyle Field on the Texas A&M campus.

He died at 48 on Oct. 30, 1933, survived by his widow and five children.

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