EDWIN WALLER may have had a brief tenure as mayor, but he was one tough political act to follow.

After being selected as Austin's first mayor in 1840, Waller served less than a year. But he left behind a legacy that Austinites encounter every day. It was Waller who surveyed and laid out the downtown street grid from 1st to 15th Streets—the one that is still used today, for better or worse. He also had the foresight to set aside 40 acres on which to build the future UT campus.

Since Waller's term 163 years ago, Austin has grown from a ragtag collection of backwater lots into an aspiring metropolis. Along the way, it has been guided by the vision of 50 mayors.

The office of mayor goes a long way toward disproving the axiom that you can't be all things to all people all the time. Austin is a city precariously poised between the provincial and the progressive, cottonwood and concrete, Old West history and New Age technology. An ideal mayor personifies the iffy alchemy of effective multitasking: Diplomat, team coach, rabble-rouser, entrepreneur, environmentalist, noise level technician, policeman, parade leader, ribbon-cutter and designated pie-taster.

It is not a vocation for the faint of heart.

# TIBRISOF ENDEARMENT

On a rainy afternoon in late February, Austin Monthly gathered together some former Austin mayors for lunch at The Headliners Club on Sixth Street to swap stories, reflect on their terms, and share their thoughts on Austin's past, present, and future.

BY STEVE UHLER / PHOTOS BY TODD WILLIAMS

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# AUSTIN MONTHLY: Let's start at the beginning. What prompted each of you to run for the office of mayor?

KIRK WATSON (1997-2001): All my life, I wanted to be like Roy Butler (*laughter*).

LEE COOKE (1988-1991): When I came here in 1970, they put up a big sign by Callahan's country store saying, "Roy Butler for Mayor." I drove by that sign every day, and after he was elected, they couldn't sell the sign. So they changed it to "Roy Butler OUR Mayor." I kept driving by that sign for years, and I guess it got to me (laughter).

FRANK COOKSEY (1985-1988): I was very interested in environmental protection at the time, and I'd participated in a number of environmental organizations. And that was kind of my focus. We were growing very rapidly and had outpaced our infrastructure, so that we were in violation of a lot of environmental organizations. That's basically what prompted me to run—trying to address some of those issues.

ROY BUTLER (1971-1975): I was on the school board for nine years, and president of it for two terms. I noticed that the city had really kind of lost its way. We had yellow school buses running up and down the street for our city transit. That was our public transportation. We had a rider back then who called Austin "the banana republic." The city was just

in disarray at that point. So a group got together, and I decided to run.

KIRK WATSON: The reason I ran was that, in part, because at the time, I felt like Austin had divided itself into a de facto two-party system. It was spending more of its time fighting and less of its time trying to do the kinds of things that the city needed to do in order to move forward.

LEE COOKE: I think the reason I ran is because, having been in Austin for 18 years at that time but having been at the head of the chamber and the JCs and also on the council, and also coming from a high-tech company, Texas Instruments, I had seen the economy go from boom to bust. Austin

had a lot of buildings that you could see through because nobody was in 'em. And we're kind of in that situation today. We had a very tough economy, we had to adjust our tax rate, we had to let employees go in the city. We really had to do some tough things. So I think that was the real reason I stepped in to serve.

RON MULLEN (1983-1985): I guess the reason I ran shows the power of a mentor, because when I was in college, I had a professor that suggested I should get into politics. He became my first campaign manager later on when I ran. And after six years as a council member, I felt like I was ready to take on the job of mayor.



Roy Butler



Jeffrey Friedman



Carole Keeton Strayhorn



Ron Mullen

### MAYORAL MINUTES Whittle While You Work

Texas politics can literally wear you down—probably no more evident than in the case of Thomas William ("Peg Leg") Ward, Austin's second mayor. In 1835, he lost a leg to Santa Anna's army at the Siege of Bexar. Six years later, he lost his right arm when a cannon misfired at a local fiesta, and he was also wounded in August of that year at the Battle of Plum Creek. The next year, he was famously fired upon by Angelina Eberly while trying to transfer the National Archives.

### The Naked Truth

"I was in the shower at the YMCA once," recalls former mayor Kirk Watson, "and somebody walked up who was obviously upset, quite angry. This li'l ole guy comes up to me, and he was some kind of ticked. He says to me, 'You're the mayor, aren't you?' I said, "Not right now. We have a rule. I'm not the mayor when I'm naked."

### Out of the Red

In 1913 Mayor Alexander Wooldridge decided to clean up Austin's notorious red-light district. He made the magnanimous offer to rehabilitate each and every working woman into a proper Christian lady and find them "honorable employment." Not surprisingly, no one took him up on the offer. The accommodating and resourceful ladies merely redistributed themselves throughout the city.

# Political Progenies

In addition to being Austin's only elected female mayor (so far), the only mayor elected three times, and winning by the highest percentage of votes ever recorded in an Austin mayoral race (more than 78 percent in 1979), Carole Keeton Strayhorn has arguably left the greatest DNA-linked political legacy. Oldest son Mark was recently appointed by President Bush as commissioner of the FDA. Twin sons Bradley and Dudley are both in private law practice. "Baby boy" Scott served as campaign manager for his mother's comptroller election, and is now special assistant and deputy press secretary for President Bush.

Voting Freeze

"The 'Earth First' folks locked me out of my office once," recalls former mayor Bruce Todd. "Locked everybody out, and they left Post-it notes hidden around my office that I would find from time to time afterward. There was one that was left in the freezer that I found about six months later that said, "When hell freezes over, you'll get my vote."

# AM: Where do you see Austin 10 years from now?

LEE COOKE: I still see Austin as a very successful city. It will continue to grow, continue to change, continue to be a unique American city and a unique world city—even though we're having a downturn right now. Like any city, Austin will have its ups and downs. But I still see an extremely bright future for this city, well past all the lifetimes of everybody around this table.

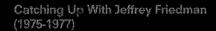
ROY BUTLER: You've got the state capital, and the University of Texas, and neither one of 'em are going anywhere. And they'll be there to be the economic engines of this community. They always have been, they always will be.

KIRK WATSON: We're seeing

a change in economics on a worldwide level. Many years ago it was economic growth and power, and I don't mean that in a negative way. I mean that the economic engine is about empires. The last century was nations, states, and superpowers. It's now about regions. No longer do you have to have large quantities of people or large masses of land. The very things that have made Austin special will be the very things that, a decade from now, will make it a special region. And it's going to require some real planning.

# AM: What is it that makes Austin special?

ROY BUTLER: For the future? I don't know of any other city that



AM: How would you describe Austin during your

FRIEDMAN: Back then, it hadn't gone through the massive economic and cultural changes that it's gone through the last 10 years or so. It was a very open community, very tolerant and accepting of new ideas. That's what made it so exciting. We were able to try things and talk about issues that most places around the country were afraid to even look at. Environmental concerns, planning, development controls that didn't cost the citizens that were living here as much as it used to...

AM: What were some of your more memorable accomplishments as mayor?

FRIEDMAN: I think we pushed through and created an atmosphere that generated the ability of music venues to spring up—allowing liquor to be sold, and the extension of liquor hours from the old

midnight closings to 2 am. As mayor I worked very hard to create the community education programs to utilize the AISD buildings at night, so we had all sorts of homegrown classes, as well as classes for beginning math, English, community support. I even taught a class on how to lobby city council. After two years we were given a national award for having the best community education cooperation government and school district in the country. Bud Dryden, who was a doctor—a great man on the city council with me—he and I created the EMS program, which is still in existence today.

What do you see as Austin's greatest challenges?

FRIEDMAN: I think the greatest challenge right now is having the public understand the budget crisis. What they're hearing is that services have to be cut, and they act like it's a major surprise. Of course, it's always easy to criticize the city manager and the current council. It's an echo effect of what's happening around the country.



Frank Cooksey



Lee Cooke



**Bruce Todd** 



Kirk Watson

has a guaranteed supply of water for 50 years. They're gonna put a statue up of Kirk Watson in 25 years for that. President Johnson saved this part of Texas by putting in those damns by the Highland Lakes, so we've got the surface water. Now Kirk's guaranteed that we've got our fair share. Water is an absolute ingredient of prosperity for a city, and we've got it.

KIRK WATSON: The big debates of the next decade will be about, how do we supply water? When you talk about regions and what regions will be great economic powerhouses and the ones that have great quality of life, it'll be the ones that have secure water futures.

FRANK COOKSEY: I think what makes Austin special is what

Mirabeau Lamar had in mind when he decided to pick this spot: It's a very beautiful place to be. As long as we keep that beauty as part of the quality of life that people associate with Austin. In the future, I think there are two key issues, in addition to water. One is public transportation. I spent a lot of time recently in Europe, and all of the great cities of Europe have great public transit systems. I think Kirk and the others have tried to establish a good base for that, but the election did not turn out well. And so we're going to be facing that issue again.

RON MULLEN: Light rail...
FRANK COOKSEY: ...light rail or whatever solution we come to, but it's going to have to be here.
The second issue is where we find

our role in the world economy. Because the World Trade Organization and all these other international institutions are going to be increasingly important. Trade is going to be essentially international, beyond nation and state borders. We established a very important economic sector in Austin in the '70s and '80s in high tech, but that area has turned out to be vulnerable in the current economy. When I was mayor, we had a big real-estate crash. This time we have a high-tech crash, if you will. And I think that, whether or not that sector revives, it's going to be essential that we have more sectors that have an international base to diversify our economy. Roy is right-we'll always have the capital and the

university. But if we're going to have a strong economy, we've got to have vital additional sectors. And I think the question is going to be, are we going to have the resources to create sectors that will drive well in this new international economy?

LEE COOKE: It really is all about brainpower. We've got to have water, we've got to have the transportation system, but we've got to have the uniqueness and vibrance of the people. In '85, I remember sitting down with Roy Spence [founder of GSD&M] and I said, "Roy, how about Austin as 'the City of Ideas'?" and Roy just lit up like a huge candle. And of course, it's on his building now. A City of Ideas where we're exporting brainpower to the world—that

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is very powerful. The university plays a phenomenal role in being that engine, but in addition to that, you need to attract a lot of brainpower from all over the world. While you're attracting a platform job, you also need to be attracting a Nobel Prize winner.

KIRK WATSON: It's interesting what we're hearing here. It's no coincidence that we're surrounded by great institutions of higher learning at the same time that we are becoming a focal point in an economy that's based on being an intellectual capital. It's also no coincidence that we brag we're the Live Music Capital of the World, and we are becoming a burgeoning film center, at the very same time we're cultivating a creative economy. It's the same creative energy. I remember in '81, when I got here, you'd see somebody with an engineering degree playing bass guitar in a rock band, or with a master's degree from UT waiting tables. . .

ROY BUTLER: ...or an unemployed Ph.D. speaking to

the council . . .

KIRK WATSON: Well, that happens today.

# AM: How would you explain Austin's city council here to somebody who's never seen it?

KIRK WATSON: If you go to the conference of mayors, you find that in other cities, meetings aren't like the ones we have in Austin, where you have these zoning cases that last longer than their entire council meetings last. There's good and bad news there. The good

news is we've got a populace that is extraordinarily interested, and there's value to that. But I think that sometimes it distracts policymakers' attention from important issues. For example, I think that one of the greatest challenges facing this community is going to be health care, particularly with some of the changes we may be seeing in Medicaid eligibility. And the city of Austin is a rare breed in that it owns its own hospital. Having said that, sometimes I feel like we spend more time on deciding whether a single piece of property in Austin should be zoned for single family or multi-family than we do on the entire health care of the community.

But I want to be clear here. I don't think that it's necessarily an unhealthy thing. It's just that everything needs to be tempered.

RON MULLEN: But how long do people speak before the Supreme Court? I mean, come on. We hear the same things over and over.

KIRK WATSON: I used to joke from the dais, "As dull as I appear, when you tell me the same thing 25 times in a row, even with me, it sinks in after a while."

FRANK COOKSEY: Well, this city has had a long tradition of citizen participation. I think to manage that in a proper way is a very important job for the mayor, because he's presiding. The truth of the matter is that there are a lot of people out there in every neighborhood that are affected by a zoning change that is substantial, who want their particular voice—not just the neighborhood's voice—but their particular voice—to be heard. And it's important that they feel they can be heard.

ROY BUTLER: They talk, but they don't vote.

LEE COOKE: If you look over the last 30 years, the city has grown exponentially, the voter registration has grown exponentially, but the turnout in the municipal elections has been dismal...

ROY BUTLER: As low as 8

# Catching Up with Carole Keeton Strayhorn (formerly McClellan) (1977-1983)

AM: What was it like being Austin's first elected woman mayor?

STRAYHORN: The first time I ran, it was 1977. I was the mother of four very young sons. The "woman" issue was real. I would have couples come in to see me after the election, and some of the women would say, "He voted for you, but I didn't." Some of the women would worry about what would happen to my kids at home. That never happened with a male candidate. Gender should never be the issue. The issue should be who is the most qualified person.

AM: What were some of your most memorable achievements as mayor?

STRAYHORN: Back when I was a kid growing up in Austin, the university and state government was about it. I wanted us to have quality-managed growth. I worked a lot on revitalization of downtown. We diversified the economy during my mayoring days—we brought in Texas Instruments, for example. I prided myself during my term that our highest unemployment rate was 2 percent. One thing that I kept from happening was, the council wanted to narrow Congress Avenue from six lanes to four. I called a news conference for the next day at noon. And at three in the morning the night before, I put up my own sawhorses, and paid for the parking meters

I was going to block off, and we narrowed it to four lanes from Sixth to Fifth. Of course, you can imagine the mess the next day at the news conference. We backed up cars forever, just to demonstrate what would happen. Anyway, council withdrew their opposition.

AM: Didn't you have a rather notable incident at the Paramount Theater?

STRAYHORN: I'd talked a lot of revitalizing downtown Austin and got an EDA grant to renovate the Paramount Theater, and I was also helping the Paramount raise private dollars. The Paramount Theater Board invited me down for a ribbon cutting to start off the renovation. I went over, and they handed me a sledgehammer. They said this is a renovation project, we want you to swing this sledgehammer. I'd swung a lot of tennis rackets, played a lot of baseball with my sons, and so when they handed me the sledgehammer, I choked up slightly. I did a beautiful backswing, but on the followthrough the sledgehammer went across the wall I'm supposed to hit, swings around behind me, and slams into the glass of the ticket booth window, with a woman in the ticket booth. Glass flew over all over Congress Avenue, the woman went diving for cover, the press was gasping...it was on the national news. My dad called first thing the next morning and said, "Carol, I've got our defense. That woman should've known better than to be in that ticket booth, and that's contributory negligence!

percent, in the last election. Out of 425,000 eligible voters, 35,000 of 'em voted. Now that's a crime.

AM: Do you find that it ends up being the same groups, though, that come to the city council meetings?

FRANK COOKSEY: When I turn on Channel 6, I see a lot of the same people today that were down there when I was there, talking to the council.

RON MULLEN: About the same issues, too.

LEE COOKE: I can turn Channel 6 on today and feel some déjà vu of 1988.

KIRK WATSON: It makes things difficult for folks who do want to have their voice heard occasionally. Say you've scheduled a zoning hearing for 4:30. Because of the number of people who signed up to speak, what happens then is the 5:30 hearing that people came down to address is now delayed until at least 6:45. Which means the issue scheduled for 6:30 is now delayed until 8:30. So that means a lot of people who want to be heard occasionally feel they can't be heard at all.

RON MULLEN: I've always said that the thing that was so hard sometimes at City Hall—like the stress between the environmental groups and business groups—is really what's made us great. Because both have come to the table and both have had a lot to do with the shaping of Austin. When Lee was there, the economy turned so stinking bad, you had to lay off city employees and everything else, didn't you?

LEE COOKE: It was interesting. The police department was running television ads saying the mayor is desecrating the police department, we've got to stop him, and urging people to call the mayor's office. And the calls came flooding in. Then the police department came to see me, and I said, "The last thing I want to do is cut the police department, but we've got a difficult situation

Catching Up with Bruce Todd (1991-1997)

AM: What was the most satisfying thing about your time as mayor?

TODD: Watching Austin evolve from the economic doldrums at the time to one that, by the time I left office, was in very good shape financially. Some of that is attributable to the economy, both worldwide and nationwide during that time period. We were able to take that financial base and attract much more. And the thing I'm most proud of is that we passed the No Smoking ordinance (along with then-councilman Gus Garcia). I've heard more people comment that they believe that was one of the best things we'd done.

AM: What was the most surprising thing that happened during your term?

TODD: I think the strength of the Save Our

Springs (SOS) movement surpassed anybody's expectations, and it added another element of the dynamics of our government that changed the face of City Hall in many ways. SOS passed during my time in office.

AM: What makes a good mayor?

TODD: Basically, I think there are three important attributes to being mayor. One is vision—that is critical. Number two is the ability to have disparate people with different viewpoints work together. The third is patience.

AM: Any thoughts on Austin's future?

TODD: The new mayor will be challenged, as is the present mayor, with economic times that are not great. It will not be a time when you can be all things to all people.

across the board." It was not something I wanted to do, it's not something the council wanted to do, but it was something we had to do. And that's the kind of position we're in now. You've got to make very hard choices.

FRANK COOKSEY: The same situation is facing the current council. It's not an easy thing to have to go in and trim jobs that sometimes you think are essential jobs. Not just cutting the fat out, but sometimes getting down to jobs that you really do not want to see cut out of the budget.

RON MULLEN: The thing is, if you don't have a good economy, all those things don't work. That's what we've got to remember, is that you still have to attract quality business to this town if you want to have jobs for your children, and your children's children. As long as we do it with a good balance. When I moved here in 1966, there wasn't very much to do...

ROY BUTLER: That's right. When I was at the university here, if your father didn't have a hardware store or work at the local bank, when you graduated you had to go to Houston or Dallas.

LEE COOKE: I think that's changed. I think we do have a multi-sector economy—in software, in research and development, in music, tourism, and entertainment, in the trade sector,

and, of course, the university. It's still fledgling, still fragile. But it has got a footing.

AM: Looking back, what are the accomplishments of which you're most proud—your legacy?

FRANK COOKSEY: The concrete thing I love to see is to go over to East Austin and see the senior citizen's center that we built when I was mayor. It's a wonderful facility. Probably the most important thing we accomplished, though, was the building and refurbishing of the water and sewage treatment plants.

ROY BUTLER: No mayor does everything. When we say we do something, it takes four votes to tango. You've got to have your members with you. The first week I was in office, I talked with Mrs. Johnson, who had just come back from being First Lady a year before to be the co-chair of the Town Lake Beautification program. We got quite a campaign going to clean up Town Lake, and now it's just wonderful. Those of you who can remember back, it was not always that way. It was really kind of an open ditch. Beer cans, tires on the side. Now I think it's one of the absolute crowning jewels of this city.

And I doubled the police department and didn't raise the taxes. We created the airport police, and fluoridation. On

a lighter note, I've been credited or blamed—with creating aides for city council members. Now even the *aides* have secretaries.

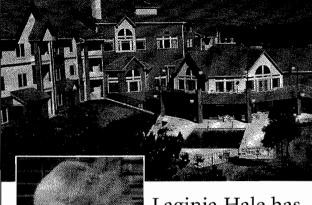
LEE COOKE: I didn't have four votes, ever. It was hard work all the time to get votes to do anything because we had a lot of independents. I think that was healthy. But as far as accomplishments, the Convention Center, moving the airport to Bergstrom . . .

ROY BUTLER: This guy created the Convention Center singlehandedly . . .

LEE COOKE: I think the real accomplishments are individuals that you were able to help along the way. A young guy that you help get into the Air Force Academy, a young couple that you helped get their first home through a government grant. Those accomplishments won't be in any history books and won't be beside your name when your epitaph is written.

I said to people after I left office that being mayor of Austin was like getting a Ph.D. every year. Because every year you deal with airports, and you deal with sewage, crime, the electric utilities, airports, hospitals, water quality, and job creation, fire and police and EMS and health department, and it just goes on and on. It's a very complex process. Sometimes you feel overwhelmed, you feel like you don't have the brainpower for all this.

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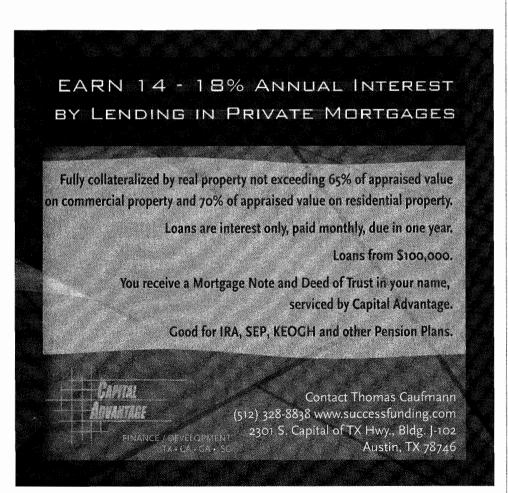
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Where Are They Now?

Roy Butler is president of Capitol Beverage Company. Jeffrey Friedman practices law (Friedman & Weddington). Carole Keeton Strayhorn is state comptroller. Ron Mullen currently serves as senior vice-president for marketing for Citizens, Inc., a consultancy firm. Frank Cooksey practices law. Lee Cooke is president and CEO of Habitek International. Bruce Todd is managing director of Winstead Consulting, a DC-based company specializing in local government consulting. Kirk Watson is senior partner at the law firm of Watson, Bishop, London & Galow.

RON MULLEN: We passed the first ordinance to get rid of billboards on MoPac, and I did start "Keep Austin Beautiful." I went to the president of the chamber of commerce and said, Let's work on this together, this should involve the private sector. So the city put up the first \$40,000, we got it started, and then turned it over to the private sector. That's something I'm proud of. Capital Metro was certainly a negative thing in most peoples' minds. But we passed it because we think we need public transportation in this town. But those things happen sometimes because you're in the right place and

KIRK WATSON: We talked about the water deal, which is something I'll always look back on with pride. Also the fact that we were able to secure so much land that will be preserved in perpetuity. We were able to get the airport done in the time frame we were all shooting for. And throughout downtown, the revitalization process.

I do want to say one thing. None of us as mayors would be able to even point to a legacy but for three things. First, that the people of this city are progressive and thoughtful and looking to improve, and they allow us to. The second is the city manager. A good city manager can make you look real good, and I was so blessed with Jesus Garza. And the third is the council. You may have your name on the plague as mayor, but the council can make the real difference.

# AM: Is being mayor something you miss? All: (in unison) No.

ROY BUTLER: Well, yes...in a nice way. RON MULLEN: It was fun, and I loved it, but it was so long ago...

ROY BUTLER: I used to work with President Johnson, and he said that the mayor is the worst job in the political system, because number one, all your shareholders live in the same town with you. And also, any time something affects them personally—taxes, garbage,

utilities, loose dogs, you name it—they call the mayor.

KIRK WATSON: But that's a two-sided coin. The flip side of the coin is that, because you're that close to everybody, you can make a real difference.

You love it, and you love it even during the times it's difficult, because there is such rare opportunity in life to be able to touch so many people and be touched by so many people in a positive way. I think anybody who serves will always miss that.... But you take that opportunity, and move on.

LEE COOKE: If I could leave an overarching message, it's that we all do our part in our three years or six years or whatever it is. It's passing the baton, and it's not passing the baton just between mayors, but between councils. And we've had a very good history in the last 30 years of passing the baton. It took us 30 years to build the Convention Center, it took us 25 years to build an airport. But that's the way it is with any city. Whether it's Frank, Ron, Carole, all of us, there was a commonality to advance what's in the best interest of the entire city. We have a great city because of what a lot of people contributed over several generations.

FRANK COOKSEY: I think the city staff deserves a lot of credit as well. It's not just the mayor or even the council...

LEE COOKE: Each one of us that served, whether we served in the '70s or '90s, can drive around the city and see what we touched, the differences that we made.

ROY BUTLER: That experience of being mayor was wonderful, and I enjoyed it very much. But when I watch the council meetings on television, I realize I would not want to be there again. As the Good Book says, there's a time and a season for everything. \*

# Mayors of Austin, 1840-2001

Mayors of Austin, 1840-2001

Edwin Waller 1840, Thomas William Ward 1840-41, Moses Johnson 1841, Asa Brigham 1842-43, J. W. Robertson 1843-44, James M. Long 1845-46, Jacob M. Harrell 1847, S. G. Haynie 1850-51, George Durheim 1852, Thomas William Ward 1853, W. P. DeNormandle 1853, John S. Ford 1854, J. T. Cleveland 1855. E. R. Peck 1856, Thomas E. Sneed 1857, B. F. Carter 1858-59, James W. Smith 1860-62, S. G. Haynie 1863-64, Thomas William Ward 1865, William Carr 1866-67, Leander Brown 1867-71, John Gleinr 1871-72, Thomas Benton Wheeler 1873-77, J. C. DeGress 1877-79, L. M. Crocker 1879-81, W. A. Saylor 1881-84, J. W. Robertson 1884-87, Joseph Nalle 1888-89, John McDonald 1890-95, Louis Hancock 1896-97, John Dodd McCell 1898-1901, R. E. White 1901-05, W. D. Shelley 1905-07, F. M. Maddox 1907-09, Alexander Penn Wooldridge 1909-19, W. D. Yett 1919-26, P. W. McFaciden 1926-33, Tom Miller 1933-49, Taylor Glass 1949-51, W. S. Drake 1951-53, Charles A. McAden 1953-55, Tom Miller 1955-61, Lester Palmer 1961-67, Harry Akin 1967-69, Travis LaRue 1969-71, Roy Butler 1971-75, Jeffrey Friedman 1978-77, Carole Keeton McClellan 1977-83, Ron Muller 1933-85, Frank C. Gooksey 1985-88, Lee Gooke 1988-91, Bruce Todd 1991-97, Kirk Watson 1997-2001, Gus Garcia 2001-present.

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