

BAPTIST HERITAGE

"People Count"

Hollie Atkinson—Marshall, TX

People Count. These words sound like a new way of designating a church survey in a community, but they are not. They are the words on a paperweight that graced the corner of Arthur Bristow Rutledge's desk during the eleven years (1965-1976) that he served as Executive Director of the Home Mission Board (now the North American Mission Board). The words were a constant reminder to Dr. Rutledge that though he had to be in a lot of conferences, all that he did must contribute to touching people or it didn't have real value.

Arthur Rutledge, who guided the Home Mission Board through our nation's civil rights struggle, was a Texan. He was a product of Texas Baptist churches, having been saved (age 12) and called to preach (age 19) at the Central Baptist Church of San Antonio. He was a product of Texas Baptist higher education, graduating from Baylor University in 1936.



And Dr. Rutledge was a Texas Baptist pastor. He pastored five Texas Baptist churches including his home church. His last and largest church was First Baptist Church in Marshall, where he labored for twelve years (1945–1957).

I was a student at East Texas Baptist College during the end of Dr. Rutledge's years in Marshall. I experienced first hand the respect with which the community held Baptists' leading pastor. The Supreme Court decision that ended segregation came just three years before Rutledge left Marshall, a town that is more "Old South" than "Southwest." Arthur Rutledge's leadership, serving as a trustee and frequent assembly preacher at Bishop College, a black Baptist school, may seem small judged by today, but they were giant steps in the 1950's and brought criticism from some in his church as well as some of the community's leadership. Perhaps it was convictions born in racially diverse San Antonio and solidified in "Old South" Marshall that enabled him to contribute to the whole of Southern Baptists during the civil rights struggles of the 1960's and 70's. The Home Mission Board, through the Home Missions magazine, like a compass, pointed Southern Baptists toward Christ in the matter of race relations and not toward culture.

Arthur Bristow Rutledge --- one of Texas' finest gifts to Southern Baptists!



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