

The Legendary Family Legal Duo of E.E.  
Townes and Herman P. Pressler  
By: David Patton

No family duo has had a greater impact upon the Oil, Gas and Energy Resources Law Section of the State Bar of Texas than E.E. Townes and his son-in-law Herman P. Pressler. Townes served as Chair 1942-1943 while Pressler had the unusual distinction of serving two terms from 1944 to 1946. Each had long careers that shaped the practice of oil and gas law and the industry we serve. Townes was an innovator of many the rules and guidelines we still follow today. Pressler was an implementer and refiner of those early rules.

I recently had the privilege of visiting with Townes Pressler, grandson of E.E. Townes and son of Herman E. Pressler. Townes Pressler is a petroleum engineer who was introduced by his father to the oil and business as a teenager. He especially remembers time spent with his grandfather around the dining room table, at the ranch and on errands in the car. He remembers joining his grandfather and dad during conversations and outings with many of the best known Texas wildcatters and lawyers. Imagine the legendary oil and gas figures these two men would have attracted around them. Much of their free family time was spent at various ranches hunting and cruising the land. When asked for a comparison of his two successful relatives, Townes Pressler suggested that his grandfather ruled the roost.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I acknowledge that the following borrows in part from an outdated list of past chair biographies that many former OGERL Council members, including me, had a hand in preparing. I also give credit to a wonderful 1952 oral interview with E.E. Townes maintained by the Bullock

Library. My summaries below reveal remarkable men who paved the way for generations of oil and gas lawyers, with more to come.

E.E. Townes (deceased)  
1942-43  
Houston

Born September 11, 1878, in San Saba, Mr. Townes was the son of J. C. Townes, a district judge and dean of the University of Texas law school. Townes Hall on the UT campus is named for J.T. Townes. E.E. Townes received a Bachelor of Literature Degree from the University of Texas in 1900 and a law degree in 1902. He married the former Elsie Garrett in 1904. They had three sons, Edgar Jr., Christopher G. and John Charles, and one daughter, Mrs. H. P. Pressler, Jr.

Mr. Townes accepted a position teaching English at Texas A&M, but disliked the cloistered life of a teacher—he wanted to practice law. In June 1903, he joined a Beaumont law firm at \$50 a month. Oil had been discovered there in 1901 and was still experiencing the impact of the boom. There were housing shortages, a lack of sanitation facilities, a shortage of conveniences and a rowdy crowd of fraudsters among the thousands of wildcatters and field hands who came from all over. In a long-recorded interview given in 1952, Townes remembered that in his first year in Beaumont he shared a room with a friend for \$25 a month. His salary was only twice that and he went into the hole his first year. The next year he joined another firm that was more active in the representing clients connected to the emerging oil and gas industry. Given the newness of large oil discoveries, there were no experienced oil and gas attorneys and there not yet a body of law to draw

upon. Spindletop allowed Townes, along with his legal peers, to begin laying the foundational bricks of oil and gas law. In his interview he mentioned how oil and gas contracts we now take as standard were developed by trial and error, changing as new issues were confronted or as courts resolved disputed matters. In those frantic Beaumont years among his clients included fledging companies that became what we now know as Gulf, Texaco and ExxonMobil, plus many more independents that became household names in the industry.

In 1917, a core group of his best clients convinced him to decline a lucrative job offer in Philadelphia and join them in forming the Humble Company. Shortly thereafter, he drew the original charter of the Humble Company (now ExxonMobil). He had a major role in formulating Humble's policies and was at the forefront of many key cases that established judicial precedent.

Judge Townes retired in 1943 as vice president, director and general counsel for the company and entered private practice. In 1947, he formed a partnership with his brother, the late John C. Townes, and his son Edgar, Jr. He was active with the firm until his death.

Townes, called "Judge" by all his friends, was a founder of the Houston YMCA and South Texas College of Law. He retired as dean in 1960, after serving 26 years. Mr. Townes was also founder of River Oaks Baptist Church and of the old Tuam Baptist Church, now South Main Baptist Church. He established and for many years taught the Townes Bible Class. Judge Townes was a director of the Houston First Federal Savings and Loan Association; vice president and trustee of Baylor University; director of Memorial Hospital; head of the executive committee of Baylor Medical School; member of the Houston Club, River Oaks

Country Club, and Eagle Lake Rod and Gun Club. Mr. Townes was a member of the Sons of the American Revolution and the State Bar Association, and was also founder and chairman of the Americans for Constitutional Government. He was made an honorary member of the Sons of the Republic of Texas, and was elected Knight of San Jacinto, the highest organization honor. Mr. Townes was awarded an honorary LLD degree by Baylor University in 1951.

Judge Townes was Chairman of the Oil, Gas and Energy Resources Law Section of the State Bar of Texas from 1942 to 1943.

He passed away January 31, 1962.

Herman P. Pressler (deceased)  
1944-46  
Houston

Herman P. Pressler, Jr., Houston attorney and civic leader, was born in Austin, Texas in 1902. After graduation from its public schools, he attended Virginia Military Institute and graduated from the University of Texas, both its undergraduate and law schools. He was a graduate of the Advanced Management Program at Harvard University Graduate School. At both Texas and Harvard, he was president of his graduating class. He came to Houston to practice law in 1925 and later joined the legal department of the Humble Oil and Refining Company (now ExxonMobil). He later served as vice president and director of that company until his retirement in 1967. Mr. Pressler was one of pioneers in oil gas conservation. He represented the massive interests of the Humble Company before the Railroad Commission of Texas and other state petroleum regulatory commissions. He was a leader in the unitization of the Katy Gas Field, the first field wide unitization of a large

Texas gas field. Active in the Mid-Continental Oil & Gas Association, he helped other states develop regulatory laws similar to those of Texas. He served on national committees that made sweeping changes to the nation's regulatory policies.

After retirement, he practiced law and handled family investments. He also was a special lecturer at South Texas School of Law.

He served as president of the Houston Bar Association (1950-51). He was president of the Texas Medical Center (1976-1982) and served on its board and executive committee until his death. He was a founder, charter member and trustee of Texas Children's Hospital. He served as its chairman PPP from 1976 to 1982 and chairman emeritus from 1982 until his death. He also was chairman of the Houston and Harris County Chapter of the American Red Cross (1952-1954) and was a trustee of Baylor College of Medicine. Mr. Pressler was a founding member of River Oaks Baptist Church. He was a member of the Houston Country Club, Bayou Club, Petroleum Club, the Eagle Lake Rod and Gun Club, and a member of other social organizations. He served on many other professional and charitable boards during his lifetime of service to his community.

Pressler's wife, the former Elsie Townes (1905-2008), was the daughter of E.E. Townes, featured above. E.E. Townes was Mr. Pressler's predecessor as OGERL Section Chair (see biography above).

Various honors were awarded him, including having a street in the Medical Center named "Herman Pressler Street" and west lobby of Texas Children's Hospital named the "Herman P. Pressler, Jr. Lobby." Sheltering Arms awarded him and his wife its Distinguished Service Award. The Houston

Bar Association presented him with the Leon Jaworski Award for outstanding community service.

He was a lifetime avid hunter. Few birds which came within the range of his gun survived. He hunted often with his wife, sons, grandsons, and friends. He also thoroughly enjoyed the mental stimulation and camaraderie of the Philosophical Society meetings.

Judge Townes was Chairman of the Oil, Gas and Energy Resources Law Section of the State Bar of Texas for two terms from 1944 to 1946.

He died in 1995.