

Standard Form For Members of the Legislature

Name of Representative Joster, LaMar P., Sr. Senator \_\_\_\_\_  
Represented Cedar County, Iowa

1. Birthday and place 4 Apr 1898 Illinois

2. Marriage (s) date place  
Mary Thomas 1920

3. Significant events for example:

A. Business \_\_\_\_\_

B. Civic responsibilities Mason

C. Profession Livestock buyer; livestock trucking business; farmer; educator

4. Church membership Methodist Episcopal

5. Sessions served 45<sup>th</sup>, 46<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup> General Assembly 1933, 1935, 1937

6. Public Offices

A. Local Member of West Branch school board 12 years; county supervisor one year; mayor of West Branch one term

B. State Speaker of the House, 47<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 1937

C. National \_\_\_\_\_

7. Death 3 Jan 1991

8. Children LaMar, Jr.; Gerald; David Lee; Mary Jeanette; Audrey Fern

9. Names of parents \_\_\_\_\_

10. Education He graduated from high school

11. Degrees He attended James Millikan University as a member  
of the student army training corps

12. Other applicable information Democrat

- He taught in the rural schools in central Illinois for 3 years.
- He then moved to Downey in Cedar County, Iowa and was principal  
of the Downey Public School in 1919
- He was the manager of the Farmers Cooperative Elevator and  
Exchange at Caledale, Iowa for 4 years.
- He started farming in 1925.



# LaMar Foster: 'Mr. Democrat' in WB

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Democrat and proud of it," said Rex. "That was back in the days when the number of Democrats in West Branch wouldn't fill a pew in this church."

Dorothy Hinkhouse Towell, who lives in Edwardsville, Illinois, was Foster's secretary during his second term. She graduated from Springdale High School in 1932 and studied one year at William Penn College. Then she landed the job that took her to Des Moines.

She said Foster was respected in the legislature. "He had lots of patience and he was a kind man. He was wonderful to work for. He was not afraid to speak up and say what he thought."

Foster was a Democrat, but he was also known as an independent thinker who didn't avoid challenging members of his own party when he believed he was right.

George S. Mills spent more than 60 years as a reporter for Iowa news papers and the Associated Press. Now retired but still writing, he lives in Des Moines.

Mills remembers the legislative sessions in the mid-1930s as "rambunctious," but they led to some of the most far-reaching legislation in the state's history, he said. It was a time when FDR's New Deal and attempts to end the Depression were sweeping America.

"No legislative session since has been that productive," Mills said.

Foster served in the legislature when laws were passed to rescue failing banks, to set up relief programs for the poor and pensions for the elderly, to raise teacher salaries, to establish the Iowa State Patrol and to give small businesses a chance to compete against large corporations.

Foster, however, did not believe that more laws were always the answer. He argued that most legislative proposals should not get out of committee

because they too often represented special interests and not the public.

"It is not the number of laws we make but the quality of those which we enact that counts," he wrote. "I am, and always have been, for laws which are for the general welfare, and I am equally as strong against pressure group legislation."

In 1935, Foster drew fire from his fellow legislators by proposing an amendment to the Iowa Constitution to abolish the House and Senate and replace it with "one legislative body of not less than ninety-nine members." The proposal failed.

"Many legislators are afraid that if the number is reduced they might be the ones to lose their jobs," he wrote.

It was in 1937 that Foster became the only West Brancher to ever be elected Speaker of the House. At the time, there were 108 House seats and the Democrats and Republicans were evenly split with 54 representatives each.

At the start of the 47th General Assembly, the two sides were deadlocked for two days in choosing a speaker. The Democrats' choice was Leroy S. Mercer of Iowa City. Roy J. Sours of Charles City was the Republicans' pick.

In three roll-call votes, the Democrats were unsuccessful in getting Mercer elected. Just to manage a tie on each vote, they had to carry in John Ryder, a Dubuque Democrat who was so seriously ill that his voice could barely be heard in the House chamber. "They had to carry him in a chair," Mills, who covered the legislative session, said.

The deadlock was broken when Foster's name was tossed in the ring. And the Democrats found help from the Republican side of the aisle in Albert Beltman of Hospers, a first-term representative "who was a renegade and wouldn't go for Sours," Mills said.

"The Democrats took Beltman to lunch and had a phalanx of Democrats

around him so the Republicans couldn't get to him. The result was that LaMar was elected. From then on they referred to Beltman as 'Boltman' for bolting his party."

Mills said Foster was "a good speaker and a damn good legislator. And he was honest. Somebody tried to buy him off with a cash payment, but he wouldn't have any part of it."

In the past 100 years only two other West Branchers have served in the state legislature — Herb Hinkhouse, a three-term Democratic representative who was first elected in 1974, and his grandfather, R.W. Hinkhouse, a legislator in the late 1890s and also a Democrat.

"It's an honor for anyone to be Speaker of the House," said Herb Hinkhouse. "Many of the issues that Pat Foster faced are still alive."

Cedar County Republicans won back the House seat in 1938 as Gordon Smith of Clarence beat Foster by 406 votes.

Two years later Foster was unsuccessful in running for the Iowa Senate. He then turned his attention to local government and his livestock buying and trucking business.

He was a member of the West Branch school board for 12 years, served one year as a county supervisor and remained active in party politics. In 1963 he was elected mayor of West Branch.

Foster only served as mayor for one year — 1964 — because he won another two-year term in the Iowa House. Ironically, he ended A.L. Mensing's string of seven straight House terms. It was Mensing, a Republican from Lowden, who defeated Foster's son — the late L.P. "Pat" Jr. — in 1952. Mensing took back the seat by beating the elder Foster in 1966.

But West Branch's Mr. Democrat found some vindication in the elections of 1964 and 1966. He won his home precinct by more than 300 votes both times.

## SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO — 1916

Nearly 400 cars of livestock passed through West Branch during the daylight hours last week.

Source: Iowa Territorial and State Legislators Collection compiled by volunteers and staff at the State Historical Society of Iowa Library, Des Moines, Iowa.

California, he states that they are having very cold weather with snow.

## Help for the hard times

By Melvin Ketter  
In early, cold and rather heavy  
be cold, windy weather that  
food source for many animals.