



**WINTON MALCOLM "RED" BLOUNT, JR., SMA '39**  
**(1921 – 2002)**



**Winton Malcolm "Red" Blount, Jr.**, was the United States Postmaster General from January 22, 1969 to January 1, 1972. He founded and served as the Chief Executive Officer of the large construction company, Blount International, based in Montgomery, AL.

Born in Union Springs, AL, on February 1, 1921, Blount attended Staunton Military Academy in Virginia in 1939 for one year, graduated from Union Springs High School, and then enrolled at the University of Alabama. He left the university after three semesters, "preferring work to academics." He then moved to Selma, AL, to manage an asphalt company. However, on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, while Winton was watching a movie in Montgomery, the movie was interrupted by an announcement of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. The next day Winton M. "Red" Blount enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps. He completed flight training and earned his wings at Turner Field, Albany, GA. Red took to aviation quickly, embarking on a lifelong love affair with flying. At one point on a low-level sortie, he flew his aircraft under a bridge on the Chattahoochee River and spent the Christmas of 1942 confined to base. After completing flight school, Red stayed on as an instructor pilot. Later he was sent to Maxwell Field near Montgomery to train in the Boeing B-29 Superfortress in preparation for combat duty. The war ended, however, before he and his crew could arrive in the Pacific Theater. He completed his military service in 1945 with the rank of First Lieutenant. In 1942, while in the Army, "Red" married his high school sweetheart, Mary Katherine Archibald, with whom he had five children. The couple would divorce in 1981.

In 1946, Blount and his brother William Houston Blount (see William's biography under *Business/Entrepreneur* in SMA Hall of Fame) started a building contractor company, Blount Brothers, which later became Blount International. The company worked on such construction projects as the First Avenue Viaduct in Birmingham, the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans, the Cape Canaveral's Complex 39A which launched Apollo 11 in Florida, and King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

In 1952, Blount was appointed the Alabama Chairman of Citizens for Eisenhower, then in 1960 he was Southeastern Campaign Chairman for Richard M. Nixon's unsuccessful presidential campaign against John F. Kennedy. In 1961, Blount was elected President of the Alabama Chamber of Commerce; in 1968, President of the United States Chamber of Commerce.

During the civil rights era, Blount was a voice for tolerance and calm when protests swept across the South. He did not favor the passage of federal civil rights legislation—believing that the South could resolve its racial issues on its own—but he urged Alabamians to obey federal civil rights laws after they were enacted. In 1963, when Gov. George Wallace threatened to defy a federal court order and prevent two black students from enrolling at the University of Alabama, Blount—who was by then a member of the university's board of trustees—intervened by contacting U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and working out a compromise. Wallace was permitted to stand in the doorway of the registrar's office and make a statement but then stepped aside and allowed the students to enroll, averting a confrontation with federal troops, who were on campus to enforce the court order. In 1964, Blount was appointed by U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson to the National Citizens Committee for Community Relations to advise the White House on the enforcement of the new Civil Rights Act of 1964 even though Blount had expressed doubts about the new law.

In 1969, Blount was appointed as the Postmaster General by U.S. President Richard Nixon, and he supervised the transition in 1971 of the U.S. Post Office Department from a Cabinet-level department of the U.S. government to a special independent executive agency. He was hence the last Cabinet-level Postmaster General, and he served as the first director of the new U.S. Postal Service. In 1971, his profile was depicted alongside that of Benjamin Franklin's on the face of a silver proof coin commemorating the inauguration of the new Postal Service. The commemorative coin was offered in a carrier with one stamp bearing a Philadelphia postmark from the old Post Office, and another from Washington D.C., placed by the new Postal Service.

### **U.S. Senate campaign, 1972**

In 1972, Blount ran an unsuccessful campaign for the United States Senate. He easily won the Republican nomination in the first-ever GOP primary election held in Alabama. He defeated former U.S. Representative James D. Martin of Gadsden, 27,736 to 16,800. Another 6,674 votes were cast for two minor candidates. Martin had been the unsuccessful Republican gubernatorial nominee in 1966 against the late Lurleen Burns Wallace.

Blount then faced in the general election the long-term incumbent Democrat, John Sparkman, who had been the 1952 Democratic candidate for vice president against Richard M. Nixon. From May 1972 to November 1972, future U.S. Future President George W. Bush transferred from the Texas Air National Guard to serve as the political director in Blount's campaign.

Blount attempted with little success to link Sparkman with Nixon's reelection opponent, U.S. Senator George S. McGovern of South Dakota. Alabama editor Ray Jenkins described the alleged McGovern-Sparkman connection as "just a little too much bull ... for the most unsophisticated Alabama voters. It was an insult to them in a way." Despite his personal wealth, Blount could not match Sparkman's war chest, which was buoyed by nationwide contributions from business interests because Sparkman was chairman of the Senate Banking Committee. Nixon concentrated on his race against McGovern and hesitated to offend a leading Senate Democrat. Similarly, Nixon snubbed U.S. Representative Fletcher Thompson in neighboring Georgia, who was challenging the Democrat Sam Nunn, and Republican Gil Carmichael in Mississippi, the Republican opponent of veteran Senator James O. Eastland. When presidential press secretary Ron Ziegler was asked if Nixon supported Blount for the Senate, Ziegler replied, "Well, he doesn't oppose him." Vice President Spiro T. Agnew did campaign for Blount. The Democrats depicted Blount's wealth as a source of shame, not the fruits of a successful business.

Alabama Governor George C. Wallace, a Sparkman supporter who after an assassination attempt had dropped out of the presidential nomination race, reportedly asked how Blount, who had "air-conditioned stables for his horses could be aware of the needs of the common man."

The final results were Sparkman 654,491 (65.3 percent) to Blount's 347,520 (34.7 percent). Blount carried only traditionally Republican Winston and Houston counties and lost his home county of Montgomery. Nixon received 728,701 votes (73.8 percent) in Alabama and carried all but six counties. He received more than twice as many votes as his former Postmaster General and outpolled his former vice-presidential rival, Sparkman, by some seventy thousand votes statewide.

### **Later years**

In 1973, Blount returned to Blount International, Inc., and became its president once again in 1974. From 1981 to 1984 Blount, Inc., built the King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

In 1980, Blount served as national chairman of the John Connally's unsuccessful primary campaign, with the nomination being won by Ronald W. Reagan of California.

1991, Blount International "turned the lights back on" in Kuwait by rebuilding its infrastructure.

In 1996, the Greenwich Publishing Group published his autobiography called *Doing It My Way*, which he had co-written with Richard Blodgett.

In 1999, Blount International, Inc., was sold to Lehman Brothers Company for \$1.35 billion.

### **.Legacy**

Blount and his second wife, Carolyn, were philanthropists and notable patrons of the arts. Together they founded the Blount Cultural Park in Montgomery, which is home to the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. The Blount's donated the land and a 100,000 square foot theater as the new home of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in 1985. The cost was \$21.5 million and, at the time, was the largest private donation to an American theater. One of Red's final public appearances came in July 2002 when Vice President Dick Cheney visited Montgomery to formally dedicate the park.

The Winton M. Blount Elementary School in Montgomery County, completed in 2003, is named in his honor. Located on the city's rapidly growing east side, it is one of the largest elementary schools in the region.

The Blount Undergraduate Initiative, a liberal arts honors program for Blount Scholars, was started at the University of Alabama. Blount Scholars reside in the Blount Living Learning Center on the campus.

The Winton M. Blount Center for Postal Studies and the Winton M. Blount Research Chair, both at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum, were founded with an endowment from the Blount estate.

He received the annual Gold Medal award from Pope John Paul II in 1981, the Living for America Award, Alabama, in 1982, and the Business in the Arts award in 1982. In 1984, he received the Outstanding Citizen of the Year from the Mental Health Association of Alabama, and he was cited by then Governor George Wallace for Distinguished Service to the State of Alabama.

In addition to being inducted into the Staunton Military Academy (SMA) Hall of Fame, he was also honored by a plaque on the SMA Memorial Wall in recognition of his exceptional service to his nation, his state, and his fellow man in the true spirit of SMA's core values of *Truth, Duty, Honor*.

Winton M. "Red" Blount, Jr., died in Highlands, North Carolina, on October 24, 2002, at the age of eighty-one.

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