

The Story of Dilman

Earl

Hankamer

Sharing the Wealth
by Barbara Elmore

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“A MAN
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Earl C. Hankamer : Born

1892

Graduates from Baylor :

1915

Picture Earl C. Hankamer, benefactor of Baylor's Hankamer School of Business, with the soft smile and neatly combed hair that many people know from photographs.

Now imagine this dignified man

chuckling with a grandchild who is combing grandpa's hair "every which-way." The second image is just as accurate as the first, said grandchildren Earl C. Hankamer III and Katherine Norris. The two Houston residents remember their grandfather not only as a successful merchant and oilman, but as a family man who always had time for his 11 grandchildren, even while at work in his downtown Houston office.

"He influenced us all, mostly by example," said Hankamer, the president, owner and CEO of Web Lift Inc. of Houston, a company which manufactures truck-mounted forklifts. Hankamer and Norris remember a man who was playful, warm and tirelessly patient. "He allowed his grandchildren to climb in his lap, comb his hair every which-way, and beg him to tell stories of when he was a little boy," Hankamer said. "He carried chewing gum and mints to give us at church and elsewhere," Norris added. "He helped us swing in the back yard, pushing the swing and helping us climb."

The senior Hankamer was the son of Karl Christian Hankammer of Germany, who arrived with his family in Galveston on New Year's Day in 1845. He changed his name to Charles Hankamer, and his many nieces and nephews knew him as Uncle Charlie, Norris said.

The German emigrants eventually settled in a community that was later renamed Hankamer, Norris said. "Family and friends in the area all say that it was named for Uncle Charlie," said Hankamer. "However, the *Texas Almanac* says it was named for his brother, who was the postmaster. It was probably named for them both, as well as the family."

Charles Hankamer's son Earl, for whom the Hankamer School of Business was named, was born Jan. 16, 1892. His education began in a small, one-room building three miles from his home, according to *The First Seventy Years*, a history of the business school at Baylor written by Dr. Emerson O. Henke and Judith A. Corwin.

Of Earl Hankamer's early life, the book quotes him thus: "We typically got up about 5:00 in the morning. In those days, we parched and ground our own coffee, and when we were quite small, probably eight years old, we started drinking coffee. When we heard the coffee grinder, that was the alarm clock for all of us to get up, and by the time we were dressed and in the kitchen, Dad would have coffee ready for us. We had breakfast and by that time it was daylight, so we could go out and milk the cows and begin whatever farming needed to be done. Of course, that was in the summer. In the wintertime we went to school."

Waking early is a habit that others in the family adopted. "I rise at 5:00 or 5:30 most mornings," said his grandson. "I understand that granddad continued to do so, making coffee and taking it to his wife."

The first Earl Hankamer's siblings included seven children from his father's first marriage and six, including Earl, from his father's second. His mother died when he was 3 years old, and his father raised his children with kindness but firmness, according to the Baylor historians. "Each one of us was provided with a horse," the book quotes Earl Hankamer as saying. "Dad gave me a horse when I was eight, and it was my responsibility to care for the horse."

He left home at age 13 to work in his married brother Roy's dry-goods store in Sour Lake, Texas, and live with Roy and his wife, Rosa. He rode a big, gray horse back to Hankamer to visit his family. He also delivered the *Beaumont Enterprise* to the homes of monthly subscribers on horseback, the historians note. By night, he sold the *Houston Chronicle* on the streets of Hankamer. Eventually he saved \$1,000, which paid his way to Baylor — then named Baylor Academy — in Waco.



Hankamer building built in :

1959

Oil

L STOCK \$2

Accompanied by four friends, the senior Hankamer attended Baylor and lived with his pastor, who had decided to return to college. He possessed an aptitude for math that his grandson shares. "Granddad could quote numbers concerning his many activities with ease and compute things in his head quickly and easily, always," Hankamer said.

He also played tennis and lettered in basketball in 1913-1914. He managed the business side of Baylor's yearbook, the *RoundUp*, in 1915. That year, his last year of college, he received the Mark Grimmett Scholarship based upon need and academic achievement, note Henke and Corwin. When he graduated from Baylor, the university registrar told him "Someday I want you to give \$100,000 to Baylor," their book notes. "These words made a deep impression on him."

The elder Hankamer returned to Sour Lake as a Baylor graduate in 1915. Although his brother Roy, who was 10 years older, had sold the store and moved to Beaumont, he returned to Sour Lake and the brothers formed a partnership called Hankamer Brothers Family Outfitters. Earl married the former Linda Miller and the couple settled in Sour Lake.

West Hampshire field oil wells were sold for \$9.6 million :

1949

"HE TREATED THE SHOESHINE BOY AND THE CEO EXACTLY THE SAME."



They had three children — Curtis, the late father of Earl Hankamer III; Raymond, who lives in Houston; and Ruby Lee, also deceased.

Following the death of his brother Roy in 1920, Earl Hankamer purchased Roy's half-interest in the store from Rosa, Roy's widow, and continued its operation. With Sour Lake serving as an oil boomtown, he began investing in wells, said his grandson.

During the Depression years, according to the Baylor history, the senior Hankamer owed \$53,000 on his Sour Lake drilling business. To make money to pay off the debt, he moved to East Texas and obtained loans to finance drilling operations. His lender, Ben Laird of Kilgore, partnered with Hankamer for three-fourths of the oil, or \$30,000. This left one-fourth of the oil to provide operating revenues. This arrangement left Hankamer with enough money to pay off his debts.

The family lived in Tyler a year before moving back to Sour Lake, his grandson noted. Curtis Hankamer graduated from high school in Sour Lake at age 15 and went off to Baylor in the fall. Hankamer III also went to Baylor, influenced by his grandfather and his father. He graduated in 1967 with a bachelor's degree in physics and math.

"Granddad was in his 40s before he really made a success in the oil business," Hankamer said. "Most of his wealth came from trading oil leases with the Texas Co. (Texaco), Humble (Exxon), Superior Oil (Mobile), Magnolia, and others. Granddad would travel to Houston during the week, peddling oil leases to the major oil companies. After a while, he became the chief lease hound for Humble and others. He was able to keep an override, or interest, in many of the deals that he brought to these companies."

Honest dealings and personal relationships served the senior Hankamer well, his grandson added. "It was trading in the oil leases that made him a wealthy man. His knowledge of the property owners who traded with him at his dry-goods store was a tremendous benefit due to his integrity and honesty."

His grandfather formed many business ventures, including land investments, but one that Hankamer vividly remembers hearing about was the formation of Prudential Drilling Co. in the late 1930s. The Henke/Corwin history also details this event. "The company was successful in discovering some large oil reserves," it says. "The largest of these was the West Hampshire field, in which four wells drilled in 1949 were sold for \$9.6 million."

In 1938, Earl Hankamer left the mercantile business, giving his two longtime employees each half of the store. "That way, he assured both of his former employees a good living throughout the remainder of their lives," Henke and Corwin say. That was one



example of Hankamer's sharing of his material successes with others. His grandson remembers similar events.

"He always tithed — and more — to his church," Hankamer said. "He also gave very generously to educational, medical and other causes with his time and money." The elder Hankamer served on Baylor's board of trustees 41 years and was chairman of the board of Baylor College of Medicine for 15 years. Although the Hankamers were major donors of the business school building, they also gave to the Armstrong Browning Library building and provided a significant endowment for the Hankamer School of Business.

Although he already knew many stories about his grandfather's legendary generosity, Hankamer often hears new tales. "Years ago, when I was closing a real estate deal as a realtor, the title company closer asked if I was related to the man that paid for his tuition through college, whom he had never even met. When I visited with the president of Baylor Medical School several years ago, he mentioned how granddad, Roy Cullen and others were instrumental in bringing the Medical Center, in its infancy, to Houston from Dallas. I continue to run into people who had similar stories about what a good and generous man he was."

The senior Earl Hankamer moved his family to Houston, where he died in his home on Sept. 24, 1985, at the age of 88. He worked into his early 80s, but acquiesced to his wife's insistence that he go to his office only half a day, his grandson said. She became ill and required constant care during the last year of her life, and Hankamer stayed by her side. "After her death he was devastated and confused for a few months," his grandson said. "Then he recovered mentally but continued to have some physical difficulties. He died sitting in an easy chair having a pleasant conversation with a caregiver."

Although he is still learning new things about the scope of his grandfather's activities, Earl C. Hankamer III said he has never heard a negative word about him, "even second-hand." Hearing new stories about people his grandfather helped does not surprise him. "He was very outgoing and never met a stranger," said his grandson. "He treated the shoeshine boy and the CEO exactly the same. He loved people."