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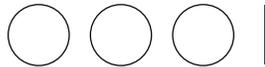
Eastland Oil Co. celebrates 100 years

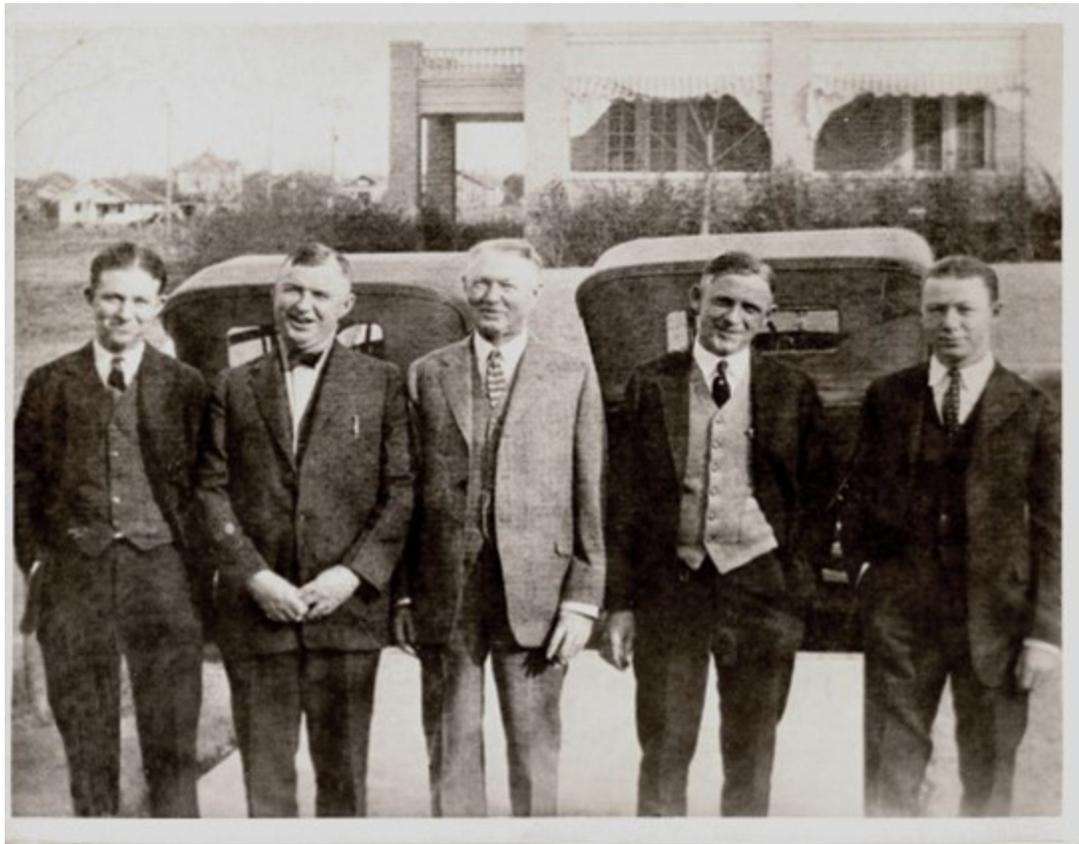


Mella McEwen, MRT.com/Midland Reporter-Telegram

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The five sons of A.M. Donnelly, founders of The Eastland Oil Company in 1923.

Courtesy Eastland Oil Company

Members of the Donnelly family and their Eastland Oil Co. have ridden the economic roller coaster of oil booms and busts, with the Great Depression and the COVID-19 pandemic thrown in for good measure. And now they get to celebrate the 100th anniversary of its incorporation.

“I attribute our success to the guys involved,” said Robert R. “Robin” Donnelly, the fourth generation of Donnellys to serve as company president.

His grandfather, George A. Donnelly Sr. and great-uncle Garrett “kept it going
(though) they had individual responsibilities. My grandfather was the finance guy and

(though) they had individual personalities. My grandfather was the finance guy and serious. Garrett was a salesman.”

Robin recalled, shortly after joining the Midland County Commissioners' Court, encountering Winkler County Judge Harold Massey, who recounted working for George Sr. and how he paid for his schooling and provided housing.

Both George Sr. and Garrett were sons of Arthur Matthew (A.M.) Donnelly, whose roots in the oil and gas industry extend back to the gas fields near Windsor, Canada, and Buffalo, New York, around 1891. A.M.'s career included working for Standard Oil Co. of New Jersey and running a gas distribution system in West Seneca, New York.

Moving to Nowata, Oklahoma, in 1908 and then Tulsa in 1916, A.M., Garrett and son-in-law Tom Vickers incorporated the A.M. Donnelly Drilling Co. in Oklahoma, drilling wells in Kansas and Oklahoma. The company first drilled wells in Texas in 1914, in Denton County.

George Sr., who worked for the company as a tool dresser and driller, brought tools to Eastland County in 1918, moving there in 1921. A.M. followed him to Texas, moving to Fort Worth in 1922, incorporating The Eastland Oil Co. in Texas in 1922 to produce oil from the Martin field the company had discovered in 1920 in Eastland County.

“They moved the headquarters to Fort Worth in 1924. That was the place to be,” recalled Robin. “They traveled west a lot. My grandfather had good friends in Abilene and did drilling with the Sojourners, the Wilsons.”

Eastland was the drilling contractor on the Roy West, T.G. Hendricks No. 2 well that discovered oil in Winkler County in 1926.

The family headed west after World War II when Robin's father, George Jr., opened an office in Monahans after returning from the war. George Jr. was a geologist with a degree from the University of Texas, and Robin recalled him bringing home samples and putting them on the kitchen table, much to his mother's displeasure. George Jr. mapped much of the Permian Basin. Framed maps he drew of Ector and Gaines counties, among others, line the halls of the company's offices in the Wilco Building.

He was instrumental in Eastland's development of the Donnelly (Cisco) and Donnelly (San Andres), Darmer (Queen), TXL (Pennsylvanian), Sable (San Andres), Power (Grayburg) and Champion Lake fields. Eastland also participated in the development of the South Cowden and Goldsmith fields in Ector County, Halley and North Ward Estes in Winkler County, Snyder in Howard County, Round Top in Fisher County, Wasson in Yoakum County and Mesquite in Jones County.

Robin joined the company in 1983, becoming president in 1999 with his father becoming chairman of the board of directors. Robin's son, Garrett, is set to become the fifth generation to head the company, joining in 2013 and named vice president in 2018.

Just like it was the individuals who helped the company survive 100 years, Robin said it's the individuals that comprise Eastland that have helped the company make contributions over that century.

"It's the community involvement," he said, citing his father's work as a trustee of the Bureau of Economic Geology and a trustee of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists' foundation. Robin's uncle Richard helped found the Petroleum Museum and long-time employee Travis Reed, who rose from pumper to production superintendent before retiring, got the pumping units in front of the museum to operate.

And it's the individuals that keep drawing Donnellys to the industry, he added.

"We have so many pressures growing on the industry," he observed. "It's not going away anytime soon. My dad always talked about 'You don't know hard times until you have a 3,000 barrel-a-day field but because of prorationing you can only produce three days a week at \$3.50 a barrel and still try to develop the field.'"

There is a lot going on in the business, he continued, but when his son takes over operations, "he'll find a way to continue on. That's my hope - I see the company going on."

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BY AMBER ELLIOTT

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