

**LETA MAE
McFARLIN
CHAPMAN
1889-1974**



**PHILANTHROPY
FOR
EDUCATION
CAUSES**

Leta Chapman's husband James and father Robert built a petroleum empire that would stand among the best in the country. Not wanting the government to get their money, James and Leta spent their fortune benefitting education, medicine, and research organizations, including the University of Tulsa.

Leta Mae McFarlin was born in October 1889 in Vernon, Texas. Her cattle-farming parents Robert and Ida first settled in Norman in 1892 then moved to Holdenville in 1901. James Chapman left school after the eighth grade to work in the family cattle business. At twenty, he headed north to Holdenville, where his uncle, Leta's father Robert and her uncle H. G. Barnard ran a cattle operation.

Chapman and McFarlin began buying and selling land in the Tulsa area. When oil was struck at the Glenn Pool oilfield, the pair realized that the greatest economic opportunity was under the land so they formed Holdenville Oil and Gas Company. They drilled a single well on land they owned near Kiefer, not far from the Glenn Pool strike. The well was a gusher, with oil flowing in abundance. By 1907, Chapman was a millionaire. A year later, he married Robert's daughter Leta, and moved to Tulsa in 1912.

When the Cushing oil field became an oil boom site, the men dissolved the Holdenville Oil and Gas Company and founded the McMan Oil Company, a blended version of their names. Their drilling ventures in the Cushing field produced oil in great quantities. In 1916, they sold the company to Magnolia Oil Company, later Mobil, for \$39 million plus 20,000 shares of Magnolia stock in 1916. The cash portion of the sale today would be worth more than \$800 million. The pair were wealthy beyond all comprehension. Yet, that same year, they formed a second successful McMan Oil and Gas Company, which they sold to Standard Oil's subsidiary Dixie Oil Company for \$20 million in 1922.

In the late 1930s, James decided to give the majority of his estate to education, medicine, and research. Education had been something he couldn't afford so he wanted to give opportunities to others. Encouraged by Leta, James gave away \$25 million during his lifetime and set up trusts for his \$120 million fortune, all the while shunning personal publicity. Their J. A. and Leta M. Chapman Trust in 1949, as well as three other subsequent trusts, have funded organizations, with the proviso that absolutely no publicity be given to the gifts. The biggest beneficiaries have been the University of Tulsa, where they have contributed scholarships and fellowships in multiple areas, including accounting, English, law and social sciences. They also supported the McFarlin Library funded by her parents and other capital projects. The Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, Trinity University and John Brown University also benefitted.

Despite his wealth, James still loved the simple life of farming that he enjoyed as a boy in central Texas. He continued to oversee his five ranches, including the famous Chapman-Barnard Ranch near Holdenville. Known as "Mr. Anonymous", few Tulsans knew who James was or what he did. Leta was a member of the Chapman-McFarlin-Barnard Institute with extensive oil, ranching, and investment interests in Oklahoma and the Southwest. Being the more sociable of the couple, she used their club memberships and hosted family parties. She cared about social welfare issues and supported a number of local causes.

James died in 1966, with a fortune estimated at \$120 million, making him one of America's richest men. Upon his death, Leta set up the Ida McFarlin perpetual charitable trust, in honor of her mother, with Tulsa's Children's Medical Center as the beneficiary. In 1967, Leta was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, following her parents' induction in 1935. It became a family affair when sister Pauline was inducted in 1971. Leta died in March 1974 at age 84. The Chapman-McFarlin legacy continues to this day.