

A Reprint from *Tierra Grande*, the Real Estate Center Journal

# REAL ESTATE



# LEGENDS



By Brandi Roppolo

From upper left: Leon Kittredge (1949), Chester D. Ralston (1944), James O. Daughtry (1956), Ebby Halliday ("in earlier days"), Ted L. Belmont (1948) and John F. "Jack" Simpson (1950s).

The buyer arrived at the closing with a lot of baggage. Not emotional baggage caused by the stress of homebuying, either. He brought \$44,000 in \$1 bills to pay for the brick home on ten acres.

"We had stacks of \$10 on every desk, table and window sill," recalls **P.M. Brown** of Texarkana. "He brought dollar bills in sacks, buckets, pockets and cans. We counted money all day long."

That was more than 50 years ago, but Brown remembers it like it was yesterday. Half a century is a long time to be in any business, but according to the Texas Real Estate Commission, Brown is one of 73 Texans who have been licensed that long. The Real Estate Center looked up a few of these real estate legends and asked them to share their stories.

Brown received his license for exactly \$2.56. The toughest sale he ever made was a 60-acre tract of land with a legal description of "a six-inch pine knot in the middle of a cotton field." When he went to view the property, Brown found a timberland tract with large pine trees, extending east to a creek that had moved almost 60 feet since the survey had been made. It took him more than two years to close the sale.

**Judge John B. Fite**, of Glen Rose, received his first real estate license in 1939 for \$1 and three signatures of support. However, his first real estate transaction occurred six years before that, in 1933, and earned him a grand total of . . . nothing. His girlfriend's father was having his farm foreclosed, and Fite persuaded a race horse owner to lease the farm for cash to

pasture his horses. But the arrangement didn't last long. Her father lost the farm the next year.

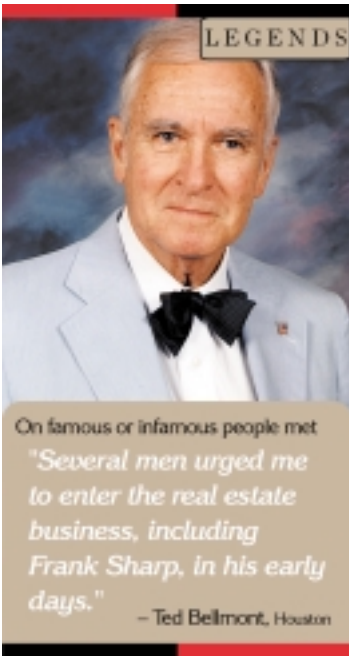
"I once listed a property for a doctor," says Fite. "She backed out of the sale, and we discovered that she had outstanding lawsuits against her husband and her son. After going through seven different law firms, she met me in court without a lawyer and told the judge she had seen every 'Perry Mason' episode and wanted to represent herself."

Fite fondly remembers the Oklahoma ranch that one multimillionaire was selling to another multimillionaire. The sale cost Fite more than he expected. He wound up paying for two dinners and a speeding ticket, and it took three years to collect the commission.

**Ted L. Belmont**, of Houston, got his license in 1947. He remembers how much

**LEGENDS**

On his funniest real estate experience  
*"Termites had hollowed out the flooring... [my client] ended up falling through the floor up to his knees."*  
 — Chester D. Ralston, McAllen



money he made on his first home sale — \$50 for the entire transaction.

**Glover C. Tunnell**, of Tyler, had to pay about \$3 and have one character reference to obtain his license in 1940. His first transaction was a farmhouse that sold for \$2,950.

Tunnell once received the red carpet treatment from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) officials. He and a friend were attending a HUD conference in Austin. Their hotel reservations were cancelled in error, and the only room available was the suite normally reserved for President Lyndon Johnson. As the President was not in town, Tunnell and his friend got the key to his room, complete with the red telephone connected to Washington, D.C.

**Lonnie Sikes**, of Bangs, went before a county judge in May 1943, answered 12 questions, paid \$5 and was welcomed into the real estate business.

"I wish someone had told me the day I started my real estate career to always tell the truth," he says. "That way you never have to remember what you told someone."

**W**hen Sikes was giving his sales pitch to a group of Canadians in the market to sell a large number of oil and gas leases, a small boy came by selling newspapers. Sikes told the boy he was busy and did not have the time to bother with a paper.

One of the men said, "Son, don't you know Mr. Sikes can't read?" To which the boy replied, "Well, if he'd put one of my papers on his desk, he might just look a little smarter."

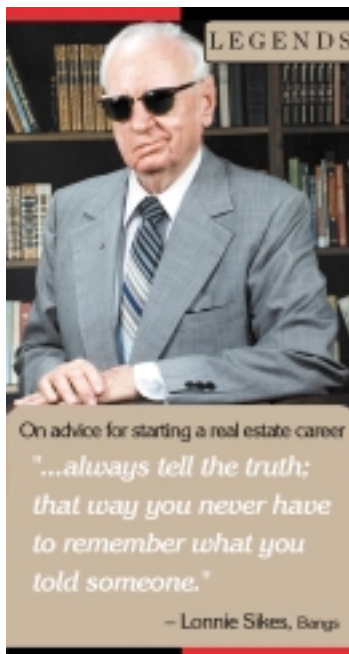
Before daylight one morning in 1946, **Harry W. Carpenter**, of Alpine, was working on tax returns when an old pickup truck pulled into his office parking lot. A man wearing a greasy, dirty black hat, and a red bandanna around his neck got out. Carpenter thought the man resembled a bank robber. The man entered the office and told Carpenter he wanted to buy a ranch.

Carpenter thought to himself, "You can't afford to buy a ranch. They're too big out here."

Carpenter described the first and only ranch he had listed, and they drove out to look at it. When the prospective buyer learned the property owner lived in northern New Mexico, he suggested they drive there to meet with him the next day. Within 24 hours, Carpenter, surprised and speechless, was drawing up his first contract in New Mexico.

**Leroy Elmore**, of Austin, received his license in 1946 by mailing in \$3 and a photograph of himself. He once made a sale to the Santa Fe Railroad in Lubbock, only to have the seller change his mind after the contract had been signed.

The seller crawled under his pier and beam house,



refusing to sign the deed. Elmore crawled in after him with the deed in hand. With his wife and daughter pleading with him, the man finally signed.

"I have never had a sale that was too tough for me," says Elmore proudly. "I'm 83 years old and still active in real estate."

The first real estate transaction of **James O. Daughtry**, of Tyler, was a handshake deal. "Back then the multiple listing service did not exist. Everyone worked independently, and there were no women licensees," says Daughtry.

He recalls the time he was forced to leave his office while a woman customer obtained \$2,000 cash from somewhere on her body. Through his years of hard work, he says he has learned that attention to detail, honesty and punctuality are the keys to success.

In 1949, **Leon Kittredge**, of Fort Worth, showed a woman a piece of property, then went to the newspaper and ran an ad with his name, address and phone number — which happened to be that of the local YMCA building. The next day, the woman went to the printed address, expecting to find his real estate office. Kittredge ended up closing his first sale in the lobby of the YMCA — his first real estate office.

He laughs about the time he had listed a house that was extremely difficult to sell. The listing was nearing expiration, so he suggested the owner paint the house bright red. The house sold before the painter completed the job.

**Ebby Halliday**, of Dallas, contracted a "double sale" on her first real estate transaction. Two rabbit hunters came across the experimental concrete houses she had listed.

"They didn't take home game that day," says Halliday. "They each took home a contract to purchase a house. The next day, they brought their wives to see their new homes."

One of the women later became Halliday's first salesperson.

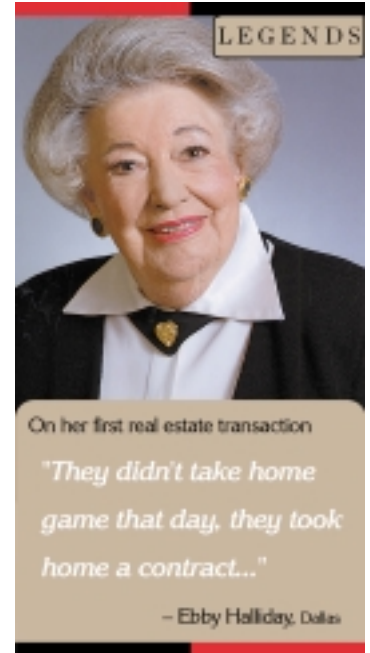
Early in 1950, **Chester D. Ralston**, of McAllen, licensed in 1944, listed a two-bedroom brick veneer home built on a pier and beam foundation with oak floors. Termites had hollowed out the flooring in front of the entrance, and when Ralston's client entered the house, he fell through the floor up to his knees.

Ralston, utterly embarrassed, had to pull him out of the hole. The man, laughing, said, "I can fix that, no problem. I'll buy the house."

Licensed in 1947, **Jack Simpson**, of Cleburne, had an appointment to show a house. When the woman arrived, she had brought her best friend along. On entering the house, the friend declared, "I wouldn't have this house if someone gave it to me." That ended that sale right there.

"I wish someone had warned me about the starving time encountered before the making and closing of my first sale," says **Sam Feldt**, of Houston, 50-year real estate veteran. "My wife was pregnant with our second child. We had rent, a car note and \$9 to our name."

His advice to established licensees? Lose the argument, make the sale. ♣



Roppolo is a former editorial assistant with the Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University.

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