

Peter Pauls Stewart
1920 - 2018



Peter Pauls Stewart was a successful business leader and philanthropist who sought to preserve and strengthen his community and country. His accomplishments throughout the DFW area are lengthy, ranging from leading successful businesses, including The Stewart Company (a wholesale distributor of tractors and appliances) and Auto Convoy (auto transportation), to real estate investment and development. He also served as a trustee for the Dallas Arboretum and the Hockaday School, and spearheaded the establishment of the Thanks-Giving Square and the Thanks-Giving Foundation in 1964 (The Dallas Morning News, 2018). In addition to his local influence, Peter made an imprint nationally, collaborating with the Reagan Administration to create a mosaic of Norman Rockwell's Golden Rule painting for the United Nations in 1985, and helping to restore America's National Day of Prayer in 1988 (United Nations, n.d.).

His interest in founding a spiritual center, the Thanks-Giving Square, can in part be explained by his son, who describes Peter as "a tireless promoter of international, intercultural and inter-religious understanding." Peter wanted to establish the center on the virtue of gratitude because he believed that "the idea of giving thanks is present in all religions." His vision for the square was to "produce a happy reaction, a unifying feeling -- one that is universal in time and place" (Simnacher, 2018). Peter therefore sought to celebrate shared religious values, namely gratitude, to help unite and improve his community during his lifetime and beyond. What he may not have realized, however, is that his core principles of service to his community and gratitude are an acknowledgment of his ancestor's legacy.

Peter's Family Heritage

Peter is the son of Harry Ewing Stewart (1890 – 1961) and Myrtle Marie Pauls (1891 – 1923). Shortly before Peter's third birthday, his mother passed away, after which Peter and his brother Waldo went to live with their paternal grandparents, William Patterson Stewart (1868 – 1945) and Jessie J Ewing (1863 – 1931) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1930 United States Federal Census, 1930). During this time, Harry Ewing Stewart moved to Houston to pursue business ventures and ultimately remarried, moved to Dallas, and purchased the Stoneleigh Hotel. Waldo and Peter eventually attended the Culver Military Academy and Harvard University. In 1942, Peter married his high school sweetheart, Betty May Exall, and after serving in the military through 1949, they resided in Dallas and raised their five children (The Dallas Morning News, 2018).

Peter is the descendant of predominantly Scotch-Irish and German roots, between his paternal (Stewart and Ewing family names) and maternal (Pauls and Cortes family names) lines respectively (see Image 1). Their stories foreshadow the virtues and values that Peter would come to exemplify in his own life.

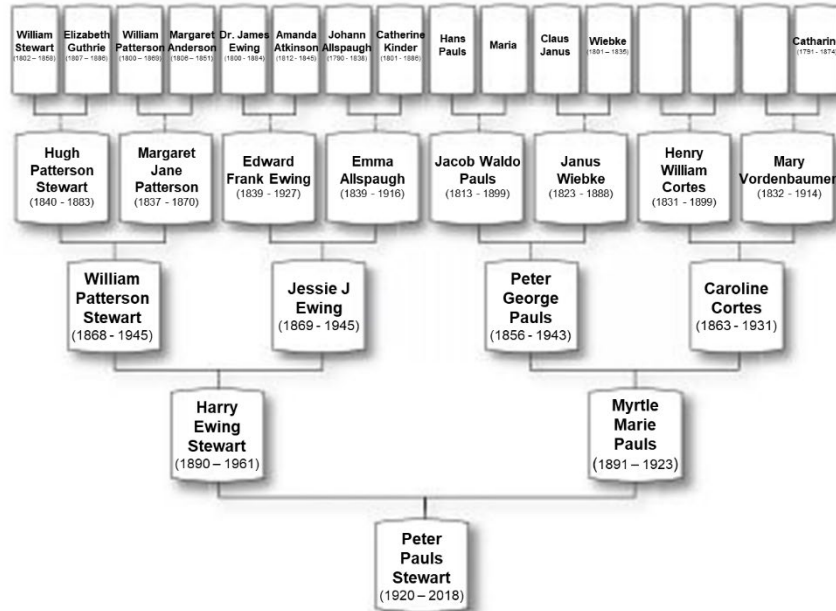


Image 1

The Stewart Family

Peter is the beneficiary of persevering and faithful Scotch-Irish ancestors. His father, Harry Ewing Stewart, is a direct descendant of John Stewart (d. 1720), a 17th-century Scottish Covenanter, who fled Scotland due to religious persecution. Covenanters were a faction within Presbyterianism, who had signed the National Covenant in 1638, affirming their opposition to the interference of the Stuart kings in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Fundamentally, Covenanters disagreed with the Stuarts’ “Divine Right” belief that they as monarchs were ordained by God to infallibly rule both the kingdom and the Church of Scotland. Because of this, Covenant followers were removed from their parishes and faced harsh persecution for their dissent (Scottish Covenanter Memorials Association, n.d.). When Charles II of England assumed the throne (r. 1660 – 1685), persecutions against Covenanters increased and his government invoked an edict reintroducing episcopacy into the Church of Scotland (The Royal Household, n.d.). To escape Charles’ tyranny, John Stewart fled his homeland of Scotland, likely near Glasgow, to northern Ireland in County Down to seek religious repose rather than compromise his beliefs (William Henry Egle, 1969).

John had one recorded son, Robert Stewart (1665 – 1730), who had two sons, Samuel (1698 – 1770) and Hugh (1719 – 1798). Both sons immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1735, where Hugh (Peter’s 4th great-grandfather) took up weaving and eventually bought a large estate near modern-day Harrisburg, PA. He married Hannah Dallas (1727 – 1760) and they raised 4 children: Jane, John, William, and Hugh. William (1757 – 1829), Peter’s 3rd great-grandfather, went on to own and operate a farm in Pennsylvania, and his son William, and grandson Hugh continued in the farming trade eventually moving to Ohio, and then to Kansas (The Stewarts of Coitsville, 1899).

The Ewing Family

Similar to Peter's Stewart family line, Peter's grandmother, Jessie J Ewing, stems from a Scotch-Irish heritage. The Ewing family shares a similar story of resiliency through religious persecution. Peter's grandmother, Jessie Ewing descends from the Glasgow Ewing family, who fled Scotland to Northern Ireland during the reign of James I (r. 1603 – 1625). Religious persecution during his reign, predominantly targeting Catholics, compelled an estimated 30,000 – 40,000 migrants to flee from Scotland to Ulster, Ireland. In fact, religious persecution is cited as the primary driver of the "movement of the Ewing [clan] from their homeland in Scotland to Ulster in Ireland" (Ewing, 1985). However, their escape to Ulster proved to be short-lived as they soon faced religious persecution again under the reign of Charles I (r. 1625 – 1649), who aimed to establish religious uniformity in his kingdom and eliminate Catholicism in Ulster (UK Parliament, 2024). Despite continuous persecution, the Glasgow Ewing clan were described as "reliable folk, prominent in the affairs of their locality, who contributed much to the civilization at that time" (Ewing, 1985). Ultimately, Peter's 5th great-grandfather, William Ewing (1706 – 1774) immigrated to the US in the late 18th century and resided in Pennsylvania. His descendants eventually migrated west to Ohio and Kansas, predominantly working as farmers (1880 United States Federal Census, 1880).

While both of Peter's Scotch-Irish family lines endured considerable adversity through religious persecution, they persevered and continued to practice their faith, raise families, and support their communities through their family farms. Centuries after the persecution of his Scotch-Irish family, Peter honored their faithfulness through the creation of The Thanks-Giving Square, where all religions are welcomed and respected.

The Pauls Family

In contrast to Peter's paternal Scotch-Irish family, Peter's mother Myrtle Marie Pauls stems from a predominantly German heritage. Her paternal grandfather, Peter George Pauls (1856 – 1943) immigrated to Galveston, TX in 1871. Peter's father, Jacob Waldo Pauls (1813 – 1899), worked as a day laborer in Denmark, so Peter George likely moved to America with little means (Danish Family Search, 1845). He immediately joined the Galveston Cotton Exchange, however, and began a successful career in manufacturing and selling cotton. In 1885, Peter married a native Galvestonian, Caroline (Carrie) Cortes (1863 - 1931). Together, they raised five children and served as leaders within their community (1910 United States Federal Census, 1910). Peter was a prominent business leader in the cotton industry. He founded the P.G. Pauls & Co., Cotton Buyers and Exporters in 1909, where he pioneered efforts to develop the international cotton trade in Texas. Peter spent long periods in Europe, in particular England and Germany, to establish business relationships, which ultimately led to the first cotton export from Texas to Germany in 1927. Because of his success in growing the cotton industry in Galveston, Peter was elected to represent and serve on committees for several Galveston Cotton Exchange conventions, he was nominated to serve as one of the first directors of the Cotton Association, and during one Cotton Convention, he closed the event with a speech persuading the committee to designate Galveston as the permanent convention location in the future (The Galveston Daily News, pp. 1909, 1919, 1927, 1943).



Peter George Pauls

In addition to his business successes, Peter dedicated much of his life to serving his community and helping those in need. He is cited in the Galveston Daily News as a "representative citizen," speaking

out against exorbitant electricity prices and providing commentary on mayoral decisions and policies. Peter also led philanthropic efforts to support the Japanese after a 1923 earthquake, he supported the local German social club, Garten Verein (erected in 1880), to foster community among German-speaking immigrants, and was an active member of the Parent-Teacher Association to support Galveston schools. In addition to his philanthropy work, he was an active member of the community, participating in sailing and speedway race events with his son, and serving on several committees including as the director of the American National Insurance Company and the Bank of Alvin in Texas (The Galveston Daily News, pp. 1894, 1923, 1943).

The Cortes Family

Alongside Peter, his wife Carrie Cortes, also served her community by hosting local DAR chapter meetings, bridge parties, and serving on the board of the Merrie Wives Club to generate donations for the city's Community Chest. She and her daughter, Myrtle (Peter's mother) were also active participants in Galveston's local debutante activities (The Galveston Daily News, 1911, 1930, 1941). Myrtle's debutante scrapbook, including photos, dance cards, and invitations to the various debutante galas and dances she attended is still housed in the Galveston & Texas History Center (Pauls, 1912 - 1914).

Carrie Cortes' parents, Henry William Cortes Sr (1831 – 1899) and Mary Vodenbaumen (1832 – 1914), were German immigrants who moved to the US in the late 19th century (1900 United States Federal Census, 1900). They were married in Galveston in 1855, raised eight children, and were active members in their Lutheran church. In 1884, Henry founded H.W. Cortes & Co. in Brenham, TX, which manufactured soda, water, lemonade, and ginger ale (The Brenham Weekly Banner, 1884). One year later, Henry moved his family to Galveston, where Mary served as a member of the German Benevolent Association and other “progressive religious movements” throughout the city (The Galveston Daily News, 1885, 1914). As such, Henry and Mary embraced their new home in Galveston and worked to invest in and serve their community through business and numerous charities.



1885 H. Cortes & Co.
Texas Bottling Works

Conclusion

While Peter's ancestors experienced hardships through religious persecution and displacement, they overcame these challenges and instead chose to lead lives of gratitude. As journalist Matthew Morgan writes:

Gratitude is a generative force, one that works against the urge to destroy. Grateful for the culture we inherit, we seek to preserve and contribute to it...grateful for the ability to thrive offered by our community, we wish to strengthen that community in turn (Morgan, 2022).

Peter and his family exemplify this perspective of gratitude for the culture that they inherited in moving to America. Rather than surrendering to self-pity for the many hardships they experienced – loss of a mother at a young age, religious persecution, poverty – they chose instead to preserve and contribute to their communities by founding companies, raising families, and supporting their local churches and organizations. Peter's family legacy of gratitude can therefore be symbolized in the Thanks-Giving Square, a place where all are encouraged to express their gratitude to God.

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