

# Strake's death at 74 ends great oil story



GEORGE W. STRAKE

The death of George W. Strake, 74, Wednesday brought to a close one of Houston's great oil stories.

Strake, who surprised everyone by bringing in the Conroe oilfield in 1931 and who later, as one of many acts of philanthropy, donated ground for 2,400-acre Camp Strake to the Boy Scouts, suffered a fatal heart attack Wednesday in Columbus.

THE RECIPIENT of the four highest papal honors from Rome bestowed on laymen, Strake was driving with his wife to Wednesday's installment of new Catholic Archbishop Francis J. Furey in San Antonio when he stopped at a motel in Columbus, where he was stricken.

Strake made his fortune with the discovery of the Conroe field in 1931, third largest oil field in the United States.

He brought in a gas-distillate well in December of that year which turned the county from a farming and lumbering region into a major oil producing area.

A FEW WEEKS later his second well came in, flowing solid oil from below 5,100 feet. Six months later he became Houston's first oil millionaire when he sold Humble part of his holdings for \$5 million.

Strake continued extensive oil operations right up to the time of his death in Coastal and West Texas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, as far east as Alabama and as far north as Michigan and Nebraska.

Numbering the Boy Scouts of America among his favorite charities, Strake, in December of 1943 donated to the Sam Houston Area Council the huge tract of land in Montgomery County which would become Camp Strake, third largest Boy Scout camp in the country.

STRAKE HAD the distinction of being decorated, from Rome, Grand Cross of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre in 1937 and Knight of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta in 1940.

The late Pope Pius XII personally decorated him Knight, Grand Cross of the Order of Saint Sylvester in 1946 and made him a Supernumerary Private Papal Chamberlain of Cape and Sword in 1950.

Strake was also a great benefactor of Saint Joseph's Hospital, to which he and his wife donated \$500,000 for medical research and education in 1966. A hospital wing has been named after him.

The first Jesuit preparatory school in Houston was named the George W. Strake Jesuit

College Preparatory School in appreciation of his efforts in founding the school.

STRAKE WAS an active participant in many other charities and was consistently one of the most generous contributors to the Houston-Harris County United Fund.

He was honored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews in 1950 for outstanding contributions to business, civic and religious affairs.

An acquaintance of Strake's described him as having "a wide circle of friends in business, banking, the priesthood, the churches — all walks of life. He was a sportsman, a fine golfer, he hunted extensively. He was a very capable businessman. He was in business actively from early boyhood right up to his death."

STRAKE WAS born Nov 9, 1894, in Saint Louis, Mo. He graduated from Saint Louis University with a bachelor of science degree after attending public schools in Saint Louis.

During World War I, he served as an aviation cadet in the Army Air Corps.

In 1929, Strake heard of oil indications on some land near Conroe. He went to see for himself and found an active oil seep and gas bubbles in a creek. He blocked up 8,500 acres, one of the first large blocks of oil acreage ever assembled, but was unable to sell leases to major oil producers.

On Aug 30, 1931, the Strake Number 1 South Texas Development Company wildcat was spudded. For three and a half months he drilled away. At 4,991 feet a powerful gas flow started up, shooting high above the tall timbers. Still the major producers weren't interested.

Only a few weeks later when the first oil flow came in did the world take notice.

He resided with his wife, the former Miss Susan Kehoe, in an apartment at 5050 Woodway.

Strake held honorary degrees from Saint Louis University, University of Notre Dame and Saint Michael's College in Winneski, Vt.

He is survived by his wife; one son, George Strake Jr.; two daughters, Mrs Robert D. Dilworth and Mrs Robert H. Parsley, and two sisters, Mrs Matilda S. Benz and Mrs William J. Pfiffner, all of Houston.

The family has requested that in lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to favorite charities or the Saint Joseph Hospital Foundation.

## George W. Strake services Friday

Funeral services for Houston oil millionaire and philanthropist George W. Strake, 74, will be at 3 PM Friday at Saint Anne's Catholic Church, 2140 Westheimer.

Strake, who discovered the gigantic Conroe oil field during the Depression and donated 2,400-acre Camp Strake in Montgomery County to the Boy Scouts, died of a heart attack at 12:45 AM Wednesday at the Holiday Inn in Columbus.

Rosary services will be held at 7:30 and 8 PM Thursday at Earthman Funerals' downtown chapel, 2420 Fannin.

Please see story and photo, Sec 1, Page 19.