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Ross Sterling, Texan: A Memoir by the Founder of Humble Oil and Refining Company

Ross S. Sterling, Ed Kilman

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Born on a farm near Anahuac, Texas, in 1875 and possessed of only a fourth-grade education, Ross Sterling was one of the most successful Texans of his generation. Driven by a relentless work ethic, he become a wealthy oilman, banker, newspaper publisher, and, from 1931 to 1933, one-term governor of Texas. Sterling was the principal founder of the Humble Oil and Refining Company, which eventually became the largest division of the ExxonMobil Corporation, as well as the owner of the *Houston Post*.

Eager to "preserve a narrative record of his life and deeds," Ross Sterling hired Ed Kilman, an old friend and editorial page editor of the *Houston Post*, to write his biography. Though the book was nearly finished before Sterling's death in 1949, it never found a publisher due to Kilman's florid writing style and overly hagiographic portrayal of Sterling.

In this volume, by contrast, editor Don Carleton uses the original oral history dictated by Ross Sterling to Ed Kilman to present the former governor's life story in his own words. Sterling vividly describes his formative years, early business ventures, and active role in developing the Texas oil industry. He also recalls his political career, from his appointment to the Texas Highway Commission to his term as governor, ending with his controversial defeat for reelection by "Ma" Ferguson. Sterling's reminiscences constitute an important primary source not only on the life of a Texan who deserves to be more widely remembered, but also on the history of Houston and the growth of the American oil industry.

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