



Ida and James Morton

Family  
Legacy

# THE MORTONS

FOR FIVE GENERATIONS AND 120 YEARS, THE MORTON FAMILY HAS ATTENDED KATY ISD SCHOOLS AND HAVE BEEN MAKING AN IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Written by Lacey Kupfer Wulf

In 1896, Elbert M. and Margaret Morton left Springfield, Missouri with their six children and arrived in Katy. They purchased 160 acres of land and began farming rice and raising cattle. This year, a Morton family member will have operated the Morton Farm for 120 years. Some Morton family members still live in Katy or its surrounding areas.

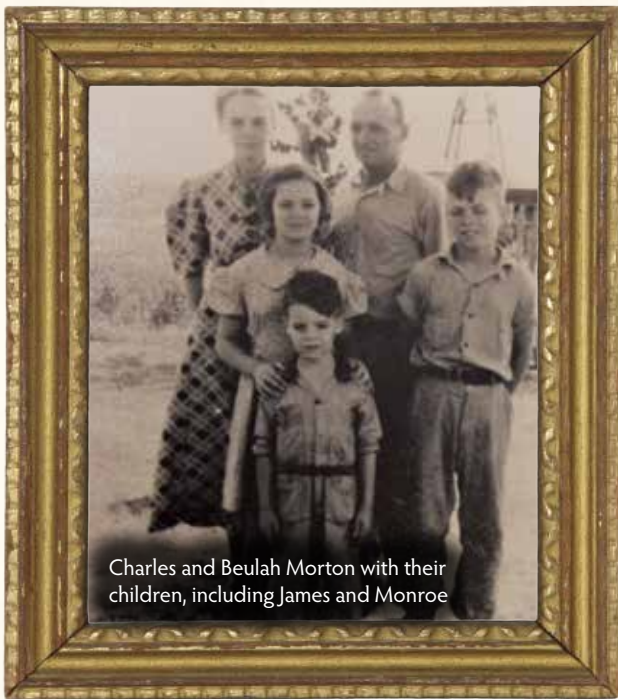
## FAMILY HISTORY

According to Elbert's grandson, 85-year-old James Morton, they traveled after receiving a promotion from the Missouri-Kansas-Texas (MKT) railroad, which was nicknamed "the Katy" and is how the City of Katy got its name.

Pamela McGowan, James' daughter says, "I think back to my great-grandparents coming to Texas in the late 1890's and what hardships they encountered to have a better life." After the powerful storm of 1900, the Morton home was

destroyed. James relates that most of the family took shelter in the kitchen, which was separate from the house and remained intact.

Later, Elbert's son Charles, his family, and the farm faced more difficulties. After nearly starving to death starting a homestead in Colorado, Charles and his wife Beulah returned to Katy in 1927, and they began saving money for the future to purchase land. This land helped their family survive one of the hardest periods in U.S. history for farmers: the Great Depression. "When you think about what my mama and daddy did, it was amazing," says James. From his own childhood, James recalls Katy's war bond drives during World War II. He says, "The main thing that drew crowds was the Katy High School band's concert. You bought a bond to get in."



Charles and Beulah Morton with their children, including James and Monroe

## GROWING UP IN HISTORIC KATY

As James grew up, Katy looked very different from today's Katy. Everyone worked in agriculture or ranching and later in oil. "It was a simple time...we were so close knit." Back then, riding bicycles or horses to school truly was the norm for him and his friends. "We were allowed to go anywhere as long as we got there on foot, bicycle, or horse," says James. Even up to only 20 to 30 years ago, the Morton children played on the miles and miles of empty land where now there are subdivisions and commercial and business developments.

## MAKING A MARK

In 1973, Pamela heard that the historic home of L.G. and T.B. Tucker, local rice farmers who introduced revolutionary equipment to the area, was going to be destroyed. This early 1900's house was a familiar one to her. "One of my favorite memories is my grandfather, Charles Morton, relating going to the Tuckers' when he was a teenager," she says. Pamela and her husband Scott purchased the home, relocated it to north Katy, and began the long and arduous process of restoring the 116-year-old house. "I think it's amazing that now [Charles'] great-great grandchildren can come to parties at the same home," she adds. Through her efforts, her family can connect with their ancestors on another level.

When the family farm turned 100 years old in 1996, it was inducted into the Texas Department of Agriculture's Family Land Heritage Program. James and his late brother, Monroe, received the award from then Texas Agriculture Commissioner, Rick Perry in Austin.

James Morton was honored and surprised when Katy ISD decided to name schools after their family. "The Morton family members have set a precedent of quiet, loyal service to the community and church," Pamela says. One of these

instances was when Monroe played on the first football team in Katy. Since the dedication of Morton Ranch High School, five scholarships have been given to graduating seniors there in honor of Monroe Morton and George Dickerson. In addition, Pamela works for Katy ISD purchasing all consumable supplies for the district. To date, four Morton generations have attended Katy ISD schools, and a fifth generation is in line to graduate from Katy ISD schools.

## COMMITMENT AND TRADITION

Today, James' grandson and Elbert's great-great grandson, James McGowan, runs agricultural production on the Morton farm. "My whole entire family is here," says Whitney, Pamela's daughter. "Why would we go?" Her son Jeffery adds, "The prairie is my home."

The Mortons passed down more than farming or living in Katy. Ida Morton, James' wife, says, "We have a wonderful Christian heritage, and we must teach our kids to share that with their children and grandchildren." Pamela adds, "This family has always had high standards of honesty, loyalty, and commitment to any task they undertake. I am proud to see my children and all their cousins continue this tradition." **KM**

*LACEY KUPFER WULF is a wife, mother of twin boys, and writer. She loves reading about her own family history and hearing others' stories too.*

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- PAMELA MCGOWAN



The Morton family has been farming in Katy for over 100 years