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Historical Society Benefactor, Peter O. Knight, Jr., Dies at 85

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY BENEFACtor,
PETER 0. KNIGHT, JR., DIES AT 85

Mr. Knight practiced business law until his retirement five years ago. He was on the board of the Exchange National Bank, which later became NCNB, between 1927 and 1969, and on the board of Tampa Electric Company from 1947 to 1974.

JOINED FATHER’S FIRM

A graduate of Princeton University, Mr. Knight received his law degree from the University of Florida. He began practicing law in 1925, when he joined Knight, Thompson and Turner, founded by his father in 1915. The firm merged with Holland, Bevis, Smith, Kibler and Hall in 1968, becoming Holland and Knight. One of the largest law firms in the Southeast, Holland and Knight has more than 200 lawyers in several Florida locations and in a Washington, D.C., office.

"He was a very generous and personal person with a great deal of interest in civic and charitable affairs," said John Arthur Jones, a senior member of Holland and Knight.

In 1982, he made a substantial donation to the University of Tampa’s Peter 0. and Girlie Knight Florida Scholars Program. He contributed to the Humane Society of Tampa Bay and the Seaman’s Church Institute. He was a major early donor to the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center.

Peter Oliphant Knight, Jr., a generous supporter of local charities and a partner in the law firm of Holland and Knight, founded by his father, died June 30, 1988, at his home on Davis Islands. He was 85.

A supporter of The Tampa Historical Society, Mr. Knight and his family gave the society the "honeymoon cottage" of his parents, Colonel and Mrs. Peter 0. Knight at 245 Hyde Park Avenue for a headquarters in 1977.

PETER 0. KNIGHT, JR.
...A Pillar of Tampa
In 1984, the Association for Retarded Citizens of Hillsborough County named its new boys’ home in his honor.

ON MANY BOARDS

Mr. Knight was the son of Colonel Peter 0. Knight, who came here from Indiana before the turn of the century. Colonel Knight established himself as one of Tampa’s most influential lawyers and businessmen, organizing the city’s old Exchange Bank. Davis Islands’ Peter 0. Knight Airport, built in 1935, was named after Colonel Knight, who died in 1946.

A former director of the Florida State Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Knight belonged to the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce and the Committee of 100 of the Tampa Chamber.

He was a director emeritus of the Florida State Fair and Gasparilla Association, and member emeritus of the board of trustees of St. Joseph’s Hospital of Tampa Foundation. He served on the boards of the Home Association, a retirement home, the Florida Gulf Coast Symphony and the MacDonald Training Center.

He was a member of the Tampa Yacht and Country Club, Palma Ceia Golf and Country Club, University Club, Tampa Club and Ye Mystic Krewe of Gasparilla. He was senior warden emeritus of St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church.

Mr. Knight’s wife, "Girlie," died in 1983. They were married in 1925. He is survived by a daughter, Rhoda K. Martorell; a son, Dr. Peter 0. Knight, IV, a professor at the University of South Florida; nine grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

While very much a community figure, making large donations to charity and serving on Ye Mystic Krewe of Gasparilla, Mr. Knight kept a low profile. He never granted newspaper interviews.

"He had a great sense of humor, but he was very private," said Mr. Jones, Mr. Knight's law partner since 1949.

"He shunned publicity. He worked behind the scenes."

A PILLAR OF TAMPA

With his death comes the loss of one of the pillars of Tampa, Mr. Jones said.

"He was one of those who gave the character and texture to the community in the ’20s and ’30s," he said.

Mr. Knight continued to be active in the Holland & Knight law firm until 1984, Mr. Jones said. He died in the home he bought in 1962.

The funeral was held at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in Tampa, followed by a private entombment in Myrtle Hill Memorial Park.