

My FATHER

JOHN HENRY BRYAN SR.

b. 6/20/1908 West Point, MS

d. 6/5/1989 West Point, MS



MY FATHER was the youngest of five sons of **James Charles Bryan (1866–1930)** and **Jonnie Mae Parker (1871–1946)**. He lived his almost 81 years in just three houses in the small town of West Point, located in the northeastern part of the state of Mississippi. It was to near West Point that **Stephen Bryan (1807–1855)**, my father’s great-grandfather, migrated with his family in 1848. Therefore, my father was the fourth generation of the Bryan family to live in the area of West Point, Mississippi.

John H. Bryan Sr.’s (1908–1989) destiny was to experience the heart of the 20th century. A teenager in the 1920s, he entered adulthood just as the Great Depression began in the 1930s. He was 33 when World War II began, but he was deferred from war service because of the essential nature of his business. His most active and successful business career years were in the relatively prosperous 1950s and 1960s.

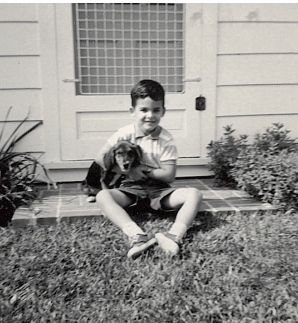
John Henry Bryan Sr. had an especially important impact on his time, his place, and his 87 (by 2011) direct descendants, three of whom are pictured below.



Left: John Henry Bryan with his dog, c. 1912.



Right: John Henry Bryan Jr. with his dog, c. 1940.



Left: John Henry Bryan III with his dog, c. 1964.



Right: Malcolm Montgomery Bryan with his dog, c. 2005.

John H. Bryan Sr., seated in the back row at the left, with classmates on the steps of the George School, now demolished. I attended first to fifth grade in this school building. Note that there are 12 boys and 14 girls, seated in rows and separated by gender.

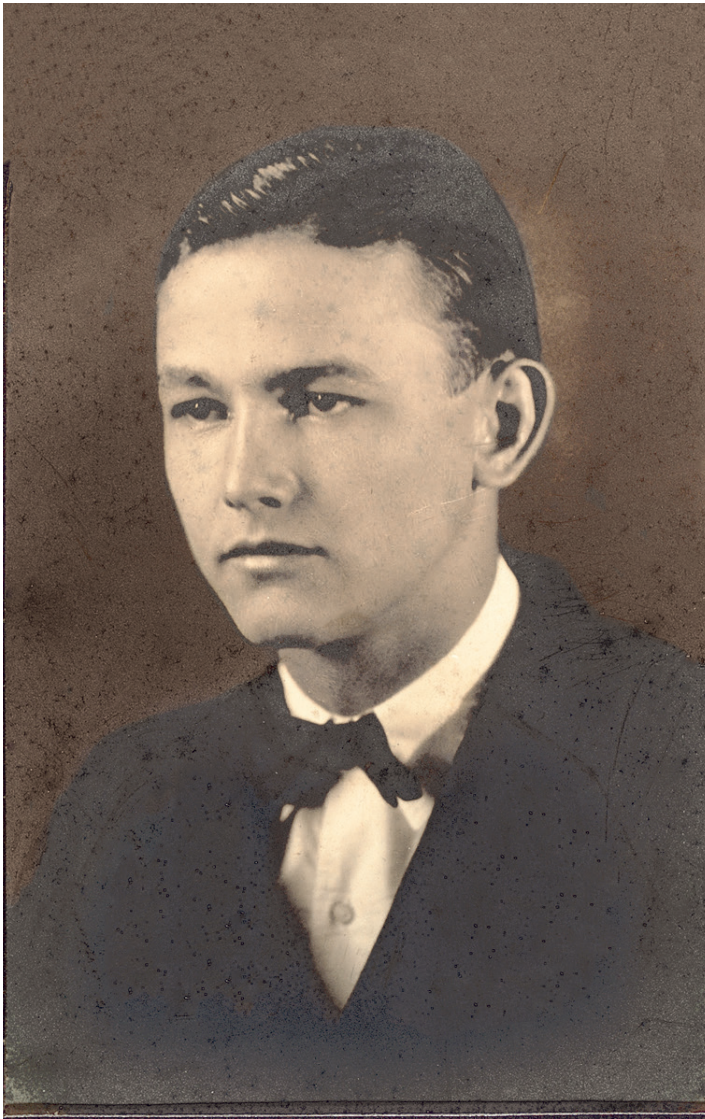


John Bryan Sr.'s schooling took place at public elementary and high schools in West Point. He graduated from West Point High School in 1926.



John Henry Bryan Sr. (pictured in the front row sixth from left) at high school graduation in 1926. Note that there are 12 boys and 22 girls. No one smiled for photos in the 1920s.

Front row, from left: Virginia Foster, Louis Strong, Elizabeth Chandler, Bill Bennett, Mary Frances Yeates, John Bryan, Frances Stokes, Buster (Andrew) Naugle, Elizabeth Wade, Paul Gilmore (my father's first cousin), Maggie Reynolds, Ralph Zimmer. Back row: Florence Taylor, Irene Ohleyer, Erlene Hamlin, TaTa (Rupert) Smith, Helen Hamlin, Lula Young, Sadie Stanley, Maybelle Johnson, Ava Joe Cotton, Bernice Bridges, Minnie Louise Brogan, Mary Ellis, Willie Mae Greshan, Sara Brady, Elmer McIntire, Frances Williams (my father's second cousin once removed), Virginia Harris, Kenneth Robinson, Dorothea Abbott, Neil Girsham, Sara Alice Scott.



My father at about age 20.

After high school, he left West Point to attend Mississippi A & M (it became Mississippi State College in 1932 and Mississippi State University in 1958). The university is located in Starkville, 14 miles from West Point.

My father was enrolled at Mississippi State for four years, from 1926 to 1930. He also attended the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, 68 miles east of West Point, in the summer of 1929. Despite this, he did not graduate, and we do not know why.

John Bryan and Mrs. Virginia Hazard (1896–1989) in the City Market, c. 1930.



As a youth, my father always worked part time in his father’s meat market.

He often talked about making early morning deliveries of fresh meat by bicycle to the homes of customers.

After his father’s death, my father worked with his oldest brother **James Charles Bryan Jr. (1898–1941)** at a family grocery store called the City Market. It was a few blocks east of the meat market on Main Street.

My father also traded horses and mules as an occupational sideline in the early 1930s. In those days, before the advent of farm equipment, mules were quite valuable and essential. I especially remember learning from my father about how to make mules and how to tell their age. Mules are sterile, hybrid animals created by breeding a male donkey (called a jack) to a female horse (called a mare). You inspect their teeth to determine age.

In 1933, as a 25-year-old bachelor, my father traveled alone by train to Chicago to attend the Century of Progress Exposition (the World’s Fair). One of his notable memories of the fair was Sally Rand’s (1904–1979) fan dance, during which the fan proved to be faster than the eye.

John Bryan Sr. was the youngest of five brothers, all of whom were aspiring and competent businessmen. This surely contributed to my father’s competitive nature.



I have no recollection of **James Charles Bryan Jr., (1898–1941)**, the oldest of my father’s brothers. He was called Charlie, and my father always spoke about him in

an admiring way. He married Tahnell Higgs (1894–1956) of Tupelo, Mississippi, in 1923. They did not have children. At age 43, he died of a kidney ailment.

George Dewey Bryan (1899–1968) was the second of the five Bryan boys. I knew him quite well and especially liked him. He lived in Starkville and had three sons, all older than I am. After owning a grocery store in Starkville, he spent many years as a livestock buyer for Bryan Brothers Packing Company. In my early years, I traveled with Uncle George and learned livestock buying from him.

Frank Jennings Bryan (1902–1972) lived in West Point throughout my youth. He had three children (one girl and two boys), all of them younger than I am. He was a very active businessman who built and owned the first Holiday Inn in West Point and for many years owned the Ford dealership in town. As a child, we often visited at the home of Uncle Frank and Aunt Marie. He died in 1972, at age 69.

William Burnett Bryan (1905–1968) was always called B Bryan or Mr. B. He was my father’s partner in the meatpacking business. Uncle B, as I recall him, was a rather shy man. I got to know him in the early 1960s.



Uncle B had four children, one girl and three boys. One son, Jimmy Bryan (b. 1937), has been a very close friend of mine throughout our lives. Uncle B died at age 62.

My father outlived his four older brothers by about 20 years.

The five sons of James Charles Bryan in 1930. Front row: Frank Jennings, John Henry, and William Burnett. Back row: George Dewey and James Charles Jr.

My first cousin Jimmy Bryan at age 53.

*Me as a baby in early 1937;
my father is 28 years old.*



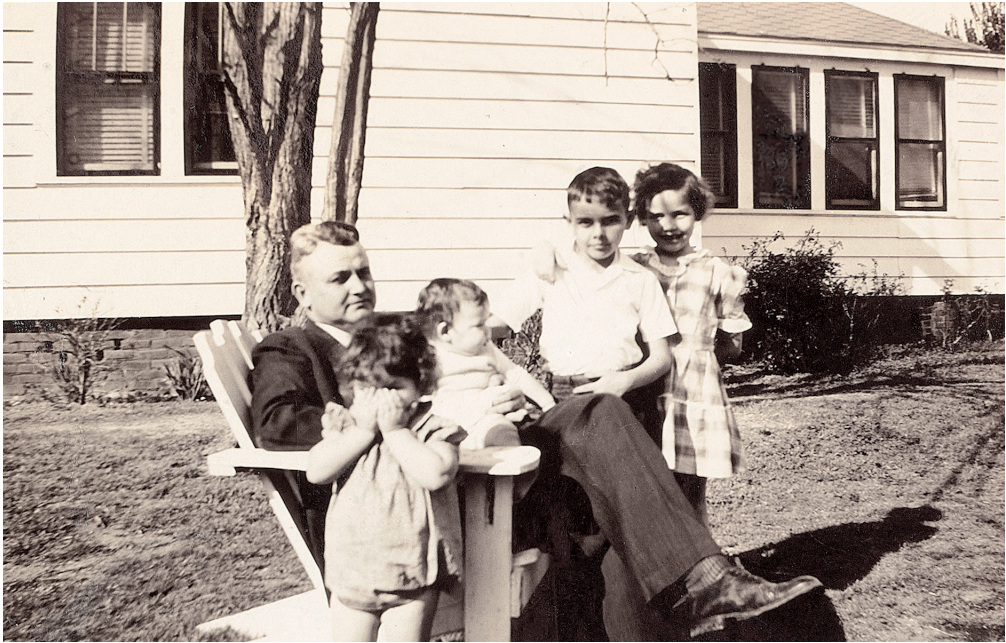
*My mother and father on the
front-porch steps at Clifton Plantation,
my mother's family home, in 1940,
with me and my sister Caroline.*



The mid-1930s turned out to be a most eventful time for my father. In early 1935, he met **Catherine Cameron Wilkerson (1909–2002)**, who lived in Starkville. That summer, on Saturday evening, July 24, they married in Columbus, Mississippi.

In the autumn of that same year, he bought their first home on 80 acres of land just south of West Point's city limits. I think he paid \$5,000 for that property. I was born on October 5, 1936, and my sister Caroline was born on September 5, 1937.

As a family, we took a few vacations in the postwar years. We went to Pensacola, Florida, and rented a beach house there during several summers in the late 1940s.



*My father with me (seven or eight),
Caroline (six or seven), Kitty (two), and
George (about six months), in 1944,
on the south side of our house, next to
Bryan Brothers Packing Company.*



*My mother and father with their four children,
swimming in the Gulf of Mexico at Pensacola, Florida,
in the summer of 1946. George is two, Kitty is four,
Caroline is eight, and I am nine years old.*

Bryan Brothers Packing Company in the early 1940s.



In early 1936, there was a life-changing event for my father. His oldest brother Charlie and his wife were planning to move to Florida. Charlie had always said that he would sell his interest in the City Market grocery store to my father and my Uncle B (William Burnett). But Charlie changed his mind and decided instead to buy his brothers' interests in the market. This meant that my father and Uncle B would together own the smaller meat market. That event was the catalyst for the founding of the meatpacking company. My father and Uncle B then each put up \$1,500, and on October 5, 1936 (the date of my birth), they established Bryan Brothers Packing Company.

An employee, Buck Swain, who worked at the meat market, recently wrote his memories of working there in the late 1930s and 1940s.¹ John and W. B. Bryan continued to own and operate the meat market for some years after starting up the meatpacking company.

Beginning at age 10 (1946), I worked each summer at the meat plant. By the early 1950s, I began to work in the office. We have a photograph of the office women with whom I worked at that time.²

Bryan Brothers Packing Company was to become a highly successful enterprise. It formed the basis of the financial well-being of the family over the next three generations.



My father (seated left) with Uncle B in the office of Bryan Brothers Packing Company, c. 1949. Standing is Waites Gable (1911–1980), who was the plant superintendent.



The meat plant in 1950, when it became Mississippi's first federally inspected meat plant. This is how the plant looked as I first remember it.

Over the next 15 years, Bryan Brothers Packing Company, owned 50 percent by each brother, grew and prospered. Annual sales reached \$4.5 million by 1950. The company also owned about 7,000 acres of farmland called Bryan Farms in Clay County. My father tended to the operations and sales for the meatpacking company, and my Uncle B managed livestock procurement and the farmlands.

Perhaps inevitably, John and B Bryan began to have serious disagreements about the business. This led to a major battle between the brothers in 1954.³ After 18 years as partners, the brothers hired local attorneys and attempted to reach an agreement to end their partnership. The attempt failed. They were to remain partners in the meat company for the next 14 years.

There were two notable byproducts of their negotiation to sever their partnership. One was the sale by my father of his half interest in the farmlands. With the proceeds of that sale (\$125,000), he purchased the local hotel and started a real-estate and construction business, which he named J. H. Bryan Incorporated.

Also as a result of those negotiations, my father agreed to disengage from the meat company for one year. For that reason, my parents decided to take a two-month grand tour of Europe with their four children in the summer of 1954. The trip had an enormous impact on me, a 17-year-old who had just graduated from high school. My father enjoyed the trip, but he never went back to Europe.

After we returned from Europe in the late summer of 1954, my father very soon resumed his former position in the management of Bryan Brothers Packing Company.



The Bryan family shown just after boarding the Queen Elizabeth II, headed for Europe, 1954. From left: John Jr., George, Catherine, John Sr., Kitty, and Caroline.



My father sunbathing on the deck of the Queen Elizabeth II at age 46, in 1954.

My father’s new business owned and operated the local Henry Clay Hotel. It also built, rented, and financed houses for residents of West Point. My father had become quite engaged in this new business when I returned from school in 1959 and began to work at the meat company. It was from 1959 to 1974 that I got to know my father quite well. We spent a lot of time together and became quite close.

Daddy, as he was called by us children, was a person with great business instincts. He loved buying and selling and was very skilled at it. And he enjoyed building—not just building the business, but also the process of adding the bricks and mortar to the factory. Further, he had an intense curiosity about new production processes, new technology, and new management ideas—and he tried them all. He loved to meet people, particularly people in the business world. Each September he and my mother traveled to Chicago for the Annual American Meat Packers Association Convention. For many years, he was a director of that organization.

My father and mother at the Conrad Hilton in Chicago with Larry Russell (at center) and his wife to his right. Larry was president of Teepak, a casing supplier. The other man at the table was the salesman assigned to the Bryan Brothers Packing Company account.



Around town, my father was know as Mr. John. In fact, the only two of his business associates who called my father “John” were his brother W. B. and my father’s second cousin once removed, Rufe Lamon, who was an executive manager at Bryan Brothers. My mother was always called Miss Catherine or Miss Kitty.



To me, especially when I was young, my father seemed to be the most extroverted person I could imagine. He would very boldly go up and talk to a stranger and start asking questions. He was not, however, the most thoughtful person in his interpersonal relationships. In fact, he could be quite direct and confrontational—especially with employees.

While on a business trip with the American Meat Packers Association in Washington, D. C., in the 1960s, John Bryan Sr. met Lyndon Johnson (1908–1973), who served as president in 1963–69. My father and Lyndon Johnson were only two months apart in age.

My father was an inherently frugal person, but perhaps not more so than his contemporaries. After all, he came of age in the Great Depression. Quite unusually, my father actually seemed to enjoy paying income taxes, and he was critical of anybody who complained about having to do so. He had started making money during World War II, when income tax rates were about 90 percent. There was, of course, a lot of patriotism at that time.

After I came of age, my father let me manage his financial affairs. He made it clear that he was not interested in tax shelters, and that he wanted to give each of his children, children-in-law, and grandchildren as much as he could each year, often paying considerable gift tax. My father was also quietly generous to a number of indigent people as well as some relatives who were needy.

Daddy always seemed a very disciplined person to me. He never smoked (my mother quit when she was almost 70). My father did chew tobacco occasionally. Neither of my parents really ever drank alcohol.



Portrait of my father painted by Marshall Bouldin (b. 1923) in the 1970s.

My father was not a person with strong political opinions. In fact, I do not recall that we ever discussed politics. He did have an inherent sympathy for the Southern blacks of his time, and he was, on occasion, quite outspoken about the subject. In the 1940s and 1950s, he worked to improve the schools for young blacks, who

had woefully inadequate facilities. In the 1970s, he strongly spoke out against segregation. In a newspaper article in the March 30, 1971, edition of *The Commercial Appeal* (Memphis), he is quoted about the West Point school board closing the black schools in West Point to resist integration:

It's damn foolishness, [John Bryan Sr.] said. And it's a waste. It is downright criminal to have that school out there empty. What's the difference if the Negro and white kids go to school together a half-day or a whole day? Some of these people around here are living in the Civil War days. I've seen this town come along, but it's not growing now. The merchants are crying like "stuck hogs" because of the boycott. There are ordinary people in the community—white people, I mean—who don't want integration, but they can live with it.*

He also vehemently objected to turning away blacks at the First Presbyterian Church. On account of his objections, he incurred the wrath of most church members, and he was not reelected as a church elder for that reason.

*"Stuck hog" is a term derived from the meat industry. Hogs squeal quite loudly when their jugular vein is slashed during the slaughtering process.



This was Marshall Bouldin's first portrait of my father. We did not like the fact that he was depicted as a golfer, so we commissioned a second one (see opposite page). Interestingly, I have found no pictures of my father playing golf, so we are pleased to have this painting.

In late 1959, my father did something rather unexpected. He took up golf. For the next 25 years, he played golf five days a week and practiced on Saturdays and Sundays. He built a golf course and started a golf club in West Point. I, of course, had to learn the game, and we played together often.

My most memorable round of golf with my father occurred at the Augusta National Golf Club in 1965, where we were guests of George Amos Poole (1907–1990) of Lake Forest, Illinois. Bill Poole, the scion of an old Lake Forest family, was in the printing business and supplied labels to Bryan Brothers. Daddy was 56 years old and had been playing golf for about six years. For the final round of that visit at Augusta, my father shot a score of 75.

Years later, in 1984, I became a member at the Augusta National Golf Club and have played there every year for the past 26 years, but I have never come close to my father's round of 75. My best round of golf there is an 80.

| HOLE | MINIMUM YARDS | PAR | HANDICAP | SCORE | HOLE | MINIMUM YARDS | PAR | HANDICAP | SCORE |
|-------|---------------|------|----------|-------|-------|---------------|------|----------|-------|
| 1 | 375 | 4 | 9 | 5 | 10 | 445 | 4 | 6 | 5 |
| 2 | 475 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 11 | 365 | 4 | 12 | 4 |
| 3 | 330 | 3 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 130 | 3 | 16 | 3 |
| 4 | 170 | 2 | 3 | 15 | 13 | 455 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| 5 | 420 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 14 | 400 | 4 | 8 | 4 |
| 6 | 170 | 3 | 17 | 2 | 15 | 465 | 5 | 2 | 6 |
| 7 | 315 | 3 | 4 | 13 | 16 | 125 | 3 | 18 | 4 |
| 8 | 475 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 17 | 345 | 4 | 14 | 4 |
| 9 | 395 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 18 | 395 | 4 | 10 | 4 |
| TOTAL | 3125 | 3485 | 36 | 37 | TOTAL | 3125 | 3495 | 36 | 38 |
| SCORE | 75 | | | | SCORE | 75 | | | |
| DATE | Nov. 16, 1965 | | | | DATE | | | | |

NOTE: Minimum distances, as shown, represent yardage from front of tees to nearest pin locations. Maximum distances represent measurements from back of tees to the farthest pin locations.

Scorecard showing my father's round of golf at the Augusta National Golf Club in 1965.

My father was a lifelong and avid sports fan. I can recall going with him to the local pool hall in West Point in the 1940s to read teletype tapes of major league baseball games. Late in the 1940s and early 1950s, he took my mother and me, and sometimes my sister Caroline, on the overnight train for about a week each year just to see the St. Louis Cardinals play baseball games. In fact, I saw two games of the 1946 World Series (the Cardinals defeated the Red Sox in seven games). In the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, as sports on television matured, my father watched sporting events all year long.

I rarely saw my father read and suspect that he had some form of dyslexia. Ironically, perhaps, a major gift to build the West Point Library was made by my father. The library is named the Bryan Public Library.

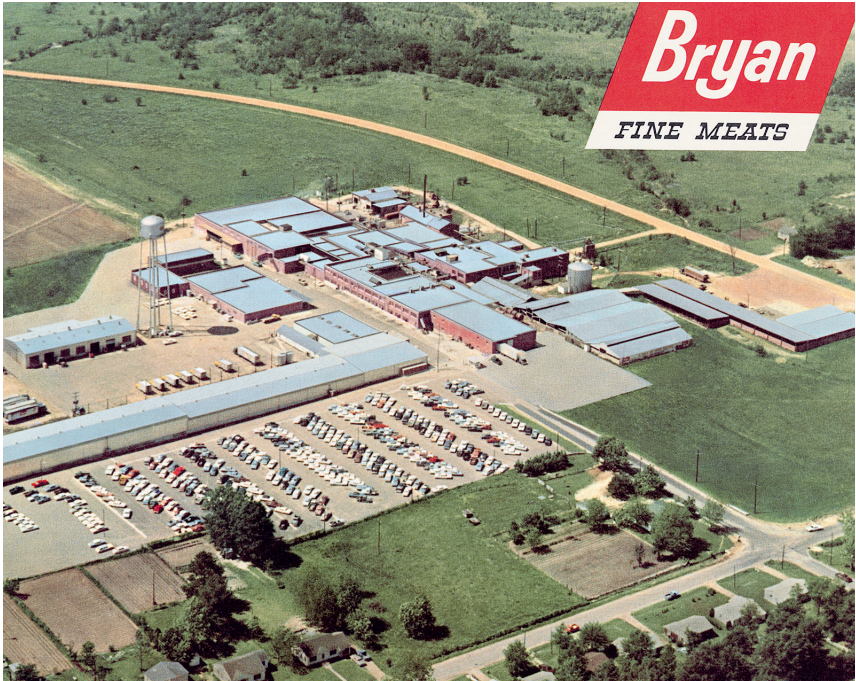
The Bryan Public Library in West Point, built in 1978.



More appropriately, I think, the Mississippi State Athletic Department’s administrative building is named for my father. The sponsoring gift for the building was made by my brother George, who, like my father, went to school at Mississippi State.

Today my father’s golfing legacy exists mostly through the endeavors of George, who incidentally is a much better golfer than I am. George founded Old Waverly, a golf club in Mississippi. In 1999 he brought the first major national sports championship event to Mississippi when Old Waverly hosted the Women’s U.S. Open Golf Championship.

The John H. Bryan Athletic Administration building at Mississippi State University.



An aerial view of the Bryan Brother's plant in about 1965.

In January 1968, at age 62, my Uncle B died of a heart attack while being treated for liver cancer at the Anderson Clinic in Houston, Texas. He had been ill for sometime. Coincidentally, my father (who was 59) had a modest heart attack that same month, while at the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans.

In anticipation of Uncle B’s death, I had made some attempts to purchase, on behalf of my family, my uncle’s half interest in Bryan Brothers Packing Company. Uncle B did not want to sell to his brother’s family, but favored instead selling the business to a large corporation. Considering all the circumstances, I decided it was in everyone’s best interest to effect a sale of the business. I discussed the situation with my cousin Jimmy and he agreed.

In a reasonably short time, we arranged a sale to Consolidated Foods Corporation, a Chicago-based firm.⁴ The two Bryan families received approximately \$18 million in Consolidated Foods stock in a tax-free exchange.



The Henry Clay Hotel on Commerce Street in West Point was opened March 25, 1930. My father bought it in 1954. In 1993 the family gave it to Mississippi Methodist Senior Services. Today it is a retirement home.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, my father’s major business occupation was building J. H. Bryan Incorporated. He kept an office at the meat company but spent more of his time at the J. H. Bryan, Inc. office in the Henry Clay Hotel and visiting building sites.

I have always believed that the activity my father loved best was building additions to the meatpacking plant, as well as building houses for local people.

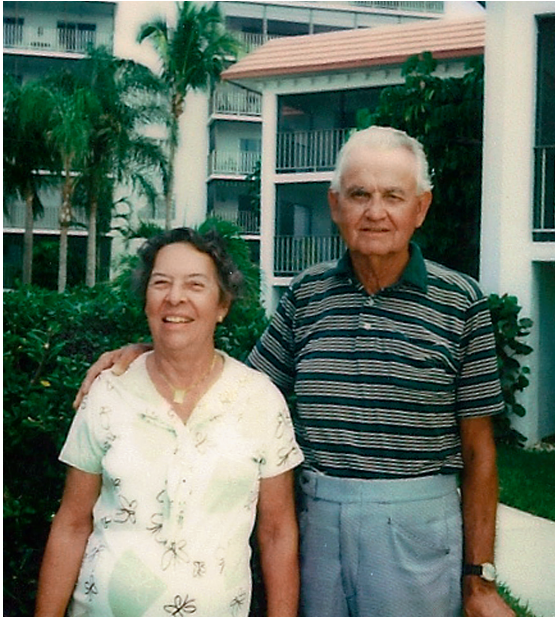
During this period, he built hundreds of homes all around West Point (in the \$12,000–\$25,000 range), often for families who were first-time homeowners.

He arranged Federal Home Administration loan guarantees, but most often he financed the homes that he built. Thus, he had a huge impact on the community of West Point through those years.

I had been directing the meat business for several years, and by 1968 sales had grown to approximately \$68 million. The company was quite profitable, had no debt (Bryan Brothers never used borrowed capital), and had about \$3 million in surplus cash.

After the sale of the business, I was officially appointed CEO of the Bryan Foods divisions of Consolidated Foods. The business continued to prosper, and by 1974 sales had reached \$150 million. That year I moved to Chicago, and in early 1975, I became the CEO of Consolidated Foods.

In 1986, the year of the 50th anniversary of the founding of Bryan Foods, my brother George, who succeeded me as president of Bryan Foods, commissioned a book by Carroll Brinson (1914–2001) entitled *A Tradition of Looking Ahead: The Story of Bryan Foods*. It related the history of the first 50 years. Brinson wrote insightfully about the respective talents of my father and his brother.⁵



My mother and father at their Florida condo.

In the early 1970s, in part because of my father’s love of golf, my parents began to look for a place to spend their winters. They went to Palm Springs, California, for one winter, but my father thought it was too cold there. The next year he decided to purchase

a two-bedroom condo on the Gulf of Mexico in Naples, Florida. He bought the condo for \$40,000 in a development called the Southern Clipper.

The story is told that my father initially planned to purchase a condo that was not on the beachfront, because he could save \$5,000 on the purchase price. My brother and I insisted that he buy the oceanfront condo and pay the extra money. Today the condo is valued at about \$600,000.

They spent about 10 winters there. Mother continued to go to Florida frequently after my father could no longer go. The condo now belongs to my sister Caroline Harrell and her family.



Helen Rasmussen, my mother, and Mary Thornley on the beach in Naples. Mother continued to enjoy the Florida place many years after my father died.



Christmas 1982 at my brother George's house. My father is 74. Left to right are my brother George, Kenny Dill (my brother-in-law), my father, me, and Robert Harrell (my brother-in-law).

In late 1970s and early 1980s, I was living in Chicago, but I saw my family reasonably often. My father came to Chicago on a few occasions. I particularly remember that he thought Chicago was a bit cold, even in the summer.

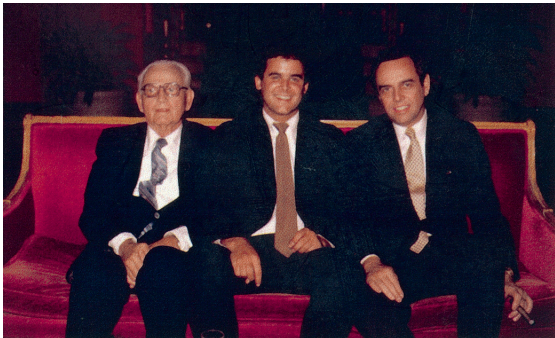
I stopped by to visit my parents in Naples during the winter, usually when I was in Florida on business. We always went home for Christmas and gathered there for family events for a few days.



My father with three grandsons, Bryan Harrell, Bob Harrell, and my son Charles in early January 1983, about to fly to Naples, Florida, where my parents would spend the winter months.

It was in February of 1983, while in Naples, Florida, that my father became ill. He was 74. My mother recalled that one day after playing golf and while watching television at their beach house, in the evening, he was unable to get up and became disoriented. She said he was later diagnosed with diabetes and hardening of the arteries.

When my father became ill, my daughter Margaret was visiting my parents during the winter break of her sophomore year at Southwestern in Memphis. She remembers seeing her grandfather in the hospital, but does not recall much about it. I suppose it will always be somewhat of a mystery as to what happened to him.



My father and me in 1983 at John III's graduation from Rhodes College. My father was almost 75 years old, John III had just turned 23, and I was 46 years old.



*My mother and father at Christmas 1983
with all 19 of their grandchildren,
most of whom are wearing school shirts.*

Within a year after his illness in Florida, my father began having memory problems. I recall that he was aware of this failing and wondered aloud what he had done wrong to cause it.

The doctors in Jackson, Mississippi, told me he had a deteriorating brain syndrome. He was attended to at home in his later years and was completely incapacitated.

My father died while choking on food. It was June 5, 1989—a few weeks short of his 81st birthday. In a tribute to my father in the *Daily Times Leader*, under the headline “Community loses giant of a man,” editor Spanky Bruce (1935–1993) wrote, “This man touched and influenced more lives in this community than anyone else who has ever lived.”⁶



Front page of the Daily Times Leader, June 6, 1989.

JOHN HENRY BRYAN SR.
PAGES 84–107

1. BUCK SWAIN REMEMBERING WHEN

Sometime rather recently, my brother George came across the following recollection written by Buck Swain (b. 1917), who had been a young employee of both Bryan Brothers Packing Company and Bryan Market in the late 1930s.

While I was at [National Guard] camp in 1936 Mr. John Bryan sent me a penny postcard and asked me to come see him before I went back to work.

Well, I went to see him and he asked me how much money I was making at Jolly's sandwich shop. I told him that I was making \$8.00 a week. He asked me if I would work for him for \$9.00 per week. I jumped at the chance. He told me it would be longer hours but that didn't make any difference—a dollar was dollar.

We worked from 6:30 or 7:00 a.m. till 6:00 or 7:00 or whenever we got caught up. We did not work by the hour. We worked by the week.

John told me that he wanted me to learn everything about everything. My first job was to patch up all the screen doors and windows in the plant. The plant was very small at the time. The office was about 12' x 14' square. The door opened by a paymasters desk and in the corner was a pile of stockinette to put on quarters of beef. There was not typewriter or anything but that one little desk by the door that the top raised up and inside was a checkbook and a few tickets and ticket books. The desk wasn't even painted....

I worked in the sausage room making wieners and bologna, also smoked sausage. We twisted the links by hand.... One day, as we were busy linking sausage, a big bull came into the sausage room belling and shaking his head and running from one side of the room to the other and scattering workers like crazy. What happened was that when they killed him and dumped him into the skinning room he was not dead. He was some mad and they had to kill him again.

About the time that I was getting pretty good at stuffing [at the meatpacking plant], John [Bryan Sr.] sent me uptown to the meat market on Murff Row at the west end of Main Street. Well, there was a man managing the meat market named Mr. W. T. Pettet. [Other] employees in the market were ... Dusty Cheatum (black), Ham Clark (black), Stacy (black) who cooked the sausage, and myself. Four meat cutters and Mr. John or Mr. B. Bryan would take turns at the cash register and when they were not there Katherine Bryan or Vena Bryan ran the register. We all stayed busy from early till late.

We had a long counter on one side of the market with stools along the counter. There was a small stove with a big skillet on it. Stacy would fry sausage patties and sell them 3 for 25 cents, put them in a small sack with about 3 crackers. There was a line of people all day long.

We bought live chickens and dressed them in the back room of the market. People would bring a whole coop of chickens in the front door of the market and we would weigh the chickens one at a time and put them in another coop. First you lay a chicken on the scale on its back, wave your hand over it in and circle and that would "hypnotize" the chicken and it would lay still for along period of time. Sounds crazy but it works.

Going back to the sausage cooking, One day Mr. B was at the cash register and he noticed that Stacy had on a pair of Florsheim shoes. He asked Stacy where he got those nice shoes he was wearing, and he told him that he got them at Mr. Pryor's store. Well, Mr. B told Stacy that he couldn't afford shoes like that on the salary he was paying him so he must be stealing sausage money so he fired Stacy. Sausage money was kept in a little flat pan in the drawer under the counter.

One day a lady parked out front of the market and blew her horn. Mr. Pettet told me to go out and see what she wanted. I went out and it was Mrs. Walker. She told me to tell Mr. Pettet that she wanted a rolled rump roast and she told me to tell him that she wanted it to be as tender as a young girls tit. Boy was I ever shocked.

[One day when] I was working for \$9.00 a week ... our rent at home was \$15.00 per month and I only had \$9.00 [saved] so I asked Mr. B to let me have \$6.00. He did and when he paid me [the next] Saturday he gave me [the full] \$9.00. I said, "Mr. B you gave me too much money, you didn't take out the \$6.00 that I borrowed." He said, "Just consider that a raise." I wish I had borrowed more.

JOHN HENRY BRYAN SR.
PAGES 84–107

2. WOMEN OF THE OFFICE



During the mid-1950s, as a teenager, I worked each summer in the office at Bryan Brothers Packing Company. Pictured above are the women with whom I worked. Front row: Miss Louise Alford, Mrs. Burton (Elizabeth) Cliett, Mrs. Bobby (Joan) Blankenship, Mrs. John (Sally) Robertson, Mrs. Estle (Kathleen) Thomas, Mrs. James (Dot) Tribble, and Mrs. A. M. (Lurlene) Edwards. Back row: Mrs. Thema Gates, Miss Marie Norman, Mrs. William Earl (Jeanette) Taylor, Miss Blanche Bogan, Miss Joy Murrah, Mrs. Charles (Melba) Ross, and Mrs. Wiley (Callie) Taylor. Photograph and identification courtesy of Jeannette Taylor.

3. THE BATTLE OF THE BRYAN BROTHERS IN 1954

As I came of age in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it was well known that my father and his brother were not getting along with one another. They had many business disagreements. They argued about expansion plans and new processes being brought to the company by my father. They disagreed about livestock purchasing and livestock commissions paid by the company to my uncle. They did not communicate well. Also **John Bryan (1908–1989)** and **W. B. Bryan (1905–1968)** had very different personalities, lifestyles, and interests. Undoubtedly, they were also victims of “sibling rivalry.”

In the spring of 1954, when I was a 17-year-old high-school senior, tension between the two brothers reached a crisis point. They decided to end their partnership, and each chose a highly regarded local attorney to advise them—Noel Malone (1903–1965) would represent Uncle B, and Thomas J. Tubb (1899–1981) was chosen to advise my father.

Each brother owned exactly one half of Bryan Brothers Packing Co. and one half of Bryan Farms. It was presumed that, after severing their partnership, one brother would own the meat business and the other would own the farm.

To execute this separation, Tom Tubb, my father’s attorney wrote a buy/sell agreement in which my father gave my uncle the option to buy either my father’s one-half of the meat company or my father’s one half of the farms at a price set by my father. The two brothers signed the agreement.

My father, fully expecting that he would become the owner of all the meat company and that Uncle B wanted the farm, set the price rather low, at about book value. To my father’s total surprise, in the letter on the following page, Uncle B elected to buy my father’s interest in the meat company and sell his interest in the farm:



JOHN HENRY BRYAN SR.
PAGES 84–107

Dear John:

I have before me the valuations submitted by you pursuant to our Agreement executed this day.

I have concluded and hereby elect to sell you the farms on the basis of the valuation fixed in your offer and to purchase the packing plant at the valuation fixed in the offer, which, according to my calculations, would involve my payment to you of \$543,837.50 and your payment to me of \$99,506.50 or a net payment by me to you of \$444,332.00.

As required by the Agreement, I will arrange to make the payment involved within the sixty days.

Your suggestion about the personal cars is agreeable.

Sincerely yours,
W. B. Bryan

A major tactical error had been made by Tom Tubb and my father. This was not an outcome that my father expected or desired. He was now forced to sell at a low price the part of the business he loved best. My father was devastated! I recall driving out to see the farms, but Daddy simply had no interest in them. The meat business was his life. It was a traumatic moment for the family. I remember it well, but I was too young to help. I was 17 and Daddy was 46.

Faced with this disastrous situation, my father simply said “I cannot do it.” He appealed to his brother and his brother’s lawyer, Noel Malone, to essentially tear up the contract, the one to which he had just agreed.

For reasons I do not know, they acquiesced. However, they made my father’s release from the contract contingent upon two conditions. My father had to sell his one-half interest in Bryan Farms to Uncle B (he sold for \$125,000), and my father had to take a leave of absence from the business for one year. Daddy quickly agreed to these conditions.

After that event in 1954, John and W. B. Bryan continued their partnership in Bryan Brothers Meat Packing Company until Uncle B died in 1968, after which the company was sold to Consolidated Foods. Unfortunately, their relationship never really improved.

4. THE SALE OF BRYAN BROTHERS PACKING COMPANY IN 1968

Bryan Bros. Is Merging Into Consolidated Foods

Bryan Bros. Packing Co., Inc., of West Point, and Consolidated Foods Corp., headquartered in Chicago, today announced a merger of the two firms. The announcement was made jointly by William Howlett, president of Consolidated, and John H. Bryan Sr.

A contract has been signed, and the transaction will be completed following receipt of a favorable tax ruling from the Internal Revenue Service.

The transaction involves the exchange of Bryan Bros. Pack-

ing Co. stock for shares in Consolidated Foods. All Bryan stock is owned by members of the immediate families of the founders of the company—John H. Bryan Sr., and the late W. B. Bryan. The 32 Bryan stockholders will receive Consolidated Foods stock, valued on the market today at more than \$14,300,000.

Mr. Howlett stressed today that Bryan Bros. will be operated as an autonomous division of Consolidated, with no changes in management or policies. John Bryan Jr. has been named pres-

ident and chief executive officer. John Bryan Sr. is chairman of the board.

Several weeks were required to work out the details of the merger. Working closely with Consolidated during the negotiating period were John Bryan Jr. and Jimmy Bryan, executor of the estate of the late W. B. Bryan.

Jimmy Bryan is president of Prairie Livestock, Inc., chief supplier of livestock for Bryan Bros. Packing Co.

The local meat packing plant—well known throughout the entire South—was “born” in 1909 when J. C. Bryan Sr., father of John H. Bryan Sr. and the late W. B. Bryan, opened a small meat market on Murff Row in West Point. The Bryan Bros. name came into existence in 1936 when, at the death of the elder Mr. Bryan, his sons carried on the family tradition with the construction of the first Bryan Bros. Packing Plant.

West Point citizens know the story from that modest beginning. The industry has never stopped growing. The company now has more than 750 employees, produces in excess of 150 million pounds of fresh, processed and canned meat products each year, and in 1967 had sales of approximately \$55,000,000.

Consolidated Foods Corp. is a diversified company with major interests in food processing and consumer goods and services. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 1967, it had sales of \$1,089,792,409.

JOHN HENRY BRYAN SR.
PAGES 84–107

5. THE HISTORY OF BRYAN FOODS: THE FIRST 50 YEARS

In the inside cover, Carol Brinson (1914–2001) summarized his book *A Tradition of Looking Ahead*, the story of Bryan Foods:

America was emerging from the Great Depression when Bryan Brothers Packing Company opened its doors for business on Monday, October 5, 1936. The place: West Point, a town of some 5,000 people in the prairie country of Clay County in northeast Mississippi.

William Burnett Bryan, thirty-one, and John Henry Bryan, twenty-eight, surely knew it was not the best of times to start a new business. They were determined, however, to give it a try. With capital of \$3,000, they built a small brick structure on “Bryan Hill,” located about a mile south of the center of town....

Overcoming problems due to rapid growth, as well as internal management conflicts, the company continued to grow during the 1950s. John H. Bryan, Jr. in 1959 became the first second-generation member of the family to move into a position of leadership with the company.

Tragedy came in 1968 with the untimely death of W. B. Bryan. John Bryan, Jr., at age thirty-three [I was thirty-one], became President, and the name of the company was changed to Bryan Packing Company, Inc. The two Bryan families later that year agreed to a merger with Consolidated Foods Corporation in Chicago. A new era had begun....

Founder John H. Bryan, Sr. retired in 1973. In 1974 John Bryan, Jr. moved to Chicago as Executive Vice President of Consolidated Foods Corporation. His younger brother, George, at age thirty [George was twenty-nine], took over the job of President at Bryan Packing Company. Elected Chief Executive Officer of Consolidated Foods in 1975, John Bryan, Jr. that following year, at age thirty-nine, became Chairman of the Board.

In 1983 George Bryan was promoted to Senior Vice President of Consolidated Foods Corporation, in charge of the Meat Group, and with offices in West Point. He and his staff moved from West Point to Memphis in 1985. On April 2, 1985 Consolidated Foods Corporation changed its name to Sara Lee Corporation.... Today Bryan Foods is a major Division of this \$8-billion-plus global company.

This book records the colorful fifty-year history of the people and events that propelled Bryan Foods into a position of leadership in America’s meat industry. Built on initiative, enterprise and creative entrepreneurship, Bryan Foods stands as an American success story in the truest sense of that phrase.

On the back cover of the book, there are photographs of portraits of **John H. Bryan Sr. (1908–1989)** and **William B. Bryan (1905–1968)** by Marshall Bouldin III (b. 1924) of Clarksdale, Mississippi. Under these portraits, Brinson wrote about the complementary talents of these two brothers.



John H. Bryan Sr.



William B. Bryan

The talents and interests of the two brothers often went in opposite directions. B., quiet and undemonstrative and an outdoorsman at heart, became an expert at raising and buying cattle. John, a complete extrovert who never knew a stranger, was more interested in management of the operations and marketing activities. He loved the people side of the business.

There were times when these differences between the two brothers created a certain tension and estrangement. However, these differences also complemented each other, resulting in a taut but effective pattern for business success. The two brothers shared the common goal of wanting to be the best in their business, and within three decades their firm overtook many older packers and became Mississippi’s largest meat packing plant. Now beginning its second half-century of service, Bryan Foods today is among America’s most progressive and profitable food processors and one of the South’s most successful enterprises.

JOHN HENRY BRYAN SR.
PAGES 84-107

6. COMMUNITY LOSES “GIANT OF A MAN”

