Foreword

DOLPH BRISCOE, JR.

In 1919, my father, Dolph Briscoe, Sr., became the Uvalde County oil distributor for the Humble Oil Company, which had its headquarters in Houston. A group of independent oilmen, including Ross Shaw Sterling, Walter Fondren, Robert Blaffer, and William Stamps Farish, created Humble in 1911 by consolidating their individual holdings in the newly discovered oil fields in southeast Texas. By the time my father went with Humble, the company was well on its way to becoming one of the most powerful business enterprises in Texas. My father kept his Humble Oil distributorship for the rest of his life.

Four years after my father affiliated with the Humble Company, he met Ross Shaw Sterling, at that time Humble's president, during a hunting trip in Uvalde County in which my father served as Mr. Sterling's guide. This deer hunting expedition, which Mr. Sterling describes in detail in this memoir, proved to be a life-changing event for my family. As a result, my father and Mr. Sterling began a friendship that would endure until Mr. Sterling's death, a quarter of a century later.

Born in 1875, Mr. Sterling had grown up near Anahuac, the town where my ancestor Andrew Briscoe had settled in the early 1830s. While in his twenties, he had worked as a farmer and a merchant. He became an independent oil operator in 1903, eventually merging his interests with other operators to form Humble Oil, one of the predecessor companies of today's ExxonMobil Corporation. Mr. Sterling also had branched out into the railroad business by the time he and my father formed their partnership. Later, after serving as chairman of the Texas Highway Commission, he was elected governor in November 1930.

It is obvious that Mr. Sterling was a gifted entrepreneur and a successful politician, but my family also knew him to be an extremely kind and generous man. He was a true gentleman. He liked Mother and Father very much and he

appreciated the way my father ran their joint cattle operation. The year I was born, 1923, was when my father and Mr. Sterling began their partnership, so Mr. Sterling was a strong presence throughout my childhood. I had the wonderful opportunity to get to know him and his wife, Mrs. Sterling, very well. Her name was Maud, but she was always Mrs. Sterling to me. They treated me like a grandson. It was my good fortune as a child to accompany my father when he and Mr. Sterling drove around on the ranch or when they visited some of the towns in the region around the ranch.

I believe Mr. Sterling enjoyed hunting more than owning cattle. He put my father in charge of not only his Chupadera Ranch but also his hunting parties, which became notable events that Mr. Sterling describes so well in this memoir. One of my father's responsibilities was to meet Mr. Sterling when he arrived from Houston in his private railroad car at Carrizo Springs, which is about forty miles from the Chupadera Ranch headquarters. Mr. Sterling often brought a few of his good friends with him to go hunting on the Chupadera. They would leave Mr. Sterling's railroad car on the siding at Carrizo Springs, and my father would drive them to the ranch in a large touring car. By this time, Mr. Sterling had sold his holdings in the Humble Oil Company to become a land developer and to buy the *Houston Post*. He also was deeply involved in Texas politics. Because of his widespread political and business connections, I got to see some pretty important people who came to the Chupadera for these special hunting parties. They included powerful Houston financier and newspaper publisher Jesse H. Jones, former Texas governors William P. Hobby and Dan Moody, cotton baron M. D. Anderson, Houston land developer and oilman Will C. Hogg, and various railroad executives, bank presidents, federal judges, and other notables. It was exciting stuff for a little kid.

One of the most vivid memories I have of my childhood was when my family went to Austin to visit Governor Sterling in the fall of 1932, after Governor Sterling lost the Democratic primary race to Ma Ferguson. Governor and Mrs. Sterling insisted that we travel to Austin and spend the weekend in the Governor's Mansion before he left office. Father was struggling with his financial problems at that time, so he felt that he couldn't spare the time. The Sterlings insisted that we make the trip, however, because they wanted me to have the opportunity to spend the night in the mansion. Father agreed, so we went to Austin. Governor and Mrs. Sterling let me sleep in the bed of my hero Sam Houston. It was quite a thrill for a young man to know that he was sleeping in the same bed that the great Sam Houston had slept in. From that day forward, I had a burning ambition to get back to the mansion. It was a formative experience.

This was when the country was in the depths of the Depression. I well remember that when my father and I walked with Governor Sterling from the

Governor's Mansion to the Capitol we were stopped several times by individuals asking him for a job. I can still see the desperation in their faces. These were men who desperately wanted to work, but there were no jobs. After dinner, my father and I and Governor Sterling walked a few blocks to the Paramount Theater on Congress Avenue in downtown Austin to see a movie. We walked everywhere, and we never had a police escort. I can say honestly that the memory of that weekend was one of the motivating forces that drove me many years later to run for governor.

Although the partnership between my father and Ross Sterling fell victim to the Depression and was never revived, they remained close friends until Governor Sterling's death in 1949. In the last years of his life, Governor Sterling often visited our house in Catarina. A couple of years before he passed away, Dad told a newspaper reporter that Ross Sterling had "always been and still is my very closest friend. I admire him more than any man I have ever known." That sums up their relationship and Mr. Sterling's importance to my family far better than I can. Along with my father, Mr. Sterling was one of my most significant role models. He was an outstanding public servant of absolute integrity who played a critical role in developing my interest in politics and state government.

I am delighted that my good friend Dr. Don Carleton, historian and director of the University of Texas Center for American History, has partnered with the University of Texas Press to publish Mr. Sterling's memoir. Dr. Carleton has done a magnificent job of rescuing this manuscript and restoring Mr. Sterling's voice to his own story. I am grateful to him for the work that he has done. There is a surprising lack of published information about the history of the men and women who have served as governor of our great state. The publication of *Ross Sterling, Texan* will help fill one of the gaps in this history, and it will insure that Ross Sterling's accomplishments and his contributions to the economic and political development of Texas will not be forgotten.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK