

Ralph Paine • Morris Paine • Hank Paine

1888 - 1974 1914 - 1990 1950 -

"Take care of the customer and everything else will take care of itself." - Paine family motto

The Howland-Hughes Department Store was a community gathering place in Waterbury for more than 100 years. It was where generations of children first met Santa Claus, or got their first Radio Flyer wagon. To some, the massive department store on Bank Street was the heart and soul of Waterbury. In an April, 1970 Waterbury Republican editorial, it was written that "the store has been known as a friendly family store partly because of the long ownership by the same family". That would be the Paine family - Ralph, Morris and Hank. From 1922 to the present, one of these three men has been at the helm of the 127,000 square foot building in the heart of downtown Waterbury.

Ralph H. Paine was born September 6th, 1888 on a farm in Hartford, Vermont. He decided early on that he didn't want to be a farmer and wanted to continue his education. To pay for his first two years at Dartmouth College, Ralph milked cows by hand, and split wood for 50 cents a cord. He graduated in 1910 and worked in Bridgeport for nearly a decade. Ralph married Florence Elaine Booth in 1913 and they had one child, Ralph "Morris" Paine, who was born November 23, 1914 in Bridgeport, CT.

In the 1920's Ralph H. Paine became the general manager of the Howland-Hughes Department Store. In 1929 the owners of the store died and Ralph led an employee buyout. Under Paine's stewardship, the company managed to survive the Great Depression, and as employees retired, Paine bought out their shares and eventually amassed 94% ownership.

Morris Paine grew up in Bridgeport and Waterbury and went on to graduate from Dartmouth College in 1936. Ultimately he decided to return to Waterbury to help his father run Howland-Hughes. Morris became the merchandise manager and quickly implemented "unit control" at the store. He also was involved in creating the Waterbury Parking Authority and served as its chairman for more than 20 years.

Henry Richmond Paine, known as "Hank", was born to Morris and his wife Margaretta Fisk Paine at Waterbury Hospital on September 14th, 1950. Two years later, his mother died suddenly. Hank graduated from Bunker Hill Elementary School and Choate School and went on to the University of Vermont where he received a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Engineering in 1972.

Hank remembers many nights during his childhood when his father would wake him up and say "Let's go". There had been a fire in town and the Red Cross had called for assistance. "Dad would open up the store and people would walk around and pick out items. There was no money exchanged because that's the way they used to do things." On Christmas Eve, when he was older, Hank would drive around town with his father, delivering missing tricycle parts, or springs for a hobby horse. "He didn't want to disappoint kids on Christmas morning, so we'd be out most of the night making sure things were right. Christmas was a magical time at Howland-Hughes."

Ralph H. Paine, the family patriarch, continued working at Howland-Hughes until he was 85 years old. While helping a customer on March 29, 1974; he fell and broke his hip. He died during surgery later that day.



Ralph Paine



Morris Paine



Hank Paine

Morris Paine carried on the family commitment to customer service and guided the store through choppy water for the next 16 years. Changing economics saw an explosion of malls across the country and downtown shopping began to slowly slip away.

In 1976 Hank Paine went to live on the 260-acre family farm in Bethel, Vermont, where he raised beef cattle, made maple syrup and cut timber. After five years of farming, he returned to Waterbury to help his father run Howland-Hughes. In 1985 Hank married Holly Elizabeth Leslie, whom he met in the toy department at Howland-Hughes. In 1988 he was promoted from superintendent to vice-president of the company and in 1990 the store celebrated its 100th Anniversary.

Little more than two months later, on June 30, 1990, Morris died of a massive heart attack. Hank was left to carry on the family credo of terrific customer service, but was faced with the stark reality that the customers were now getting scarce. Downtown was mired in an economic slump and Waterbury, like most cities across the country, was losing its retail business to malls. Instead of throwing in the towel, like every other downtown department store in Connecticut, Hank transitioned the ailing Howland-Hughes into the Connecticut Store, where everything for sale was made in Connecticut.

Hank Paine has since ventured into internet sales, making his Made in Connecticut merchandise readily available to customers around the world.