

# Obituary: Virginia Connally

April 3, 2019

**Virginia Connally**, Baptist philanthropist and the first female physician in Abilene, died March 31. She was 106. Connally was born Ada Virginia Hawkins in Temple on Dec. 4, 1912. After one year at Temple Junior College, she transferred to Simmons University in 1930, and she graduated from what is now Hardin-Simmons University in 1933 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. At a time when it was rare for a woman to pursue a career in the medical profession, she entered Louisiana State University Medical School in 1933 and earned her M.D. degree in 1937. She was awarded an internship and residency in the field of eye, ear, nose and throat at Charity Hospital in New Orleans from 1937 to 1940. Upon completing this residency, she returned to Abilene and began a medical practice she continued until 1982. She served as chief of staff at both St. Ann's Hospital and Hendrick Medical Center. She also was the physician for Hendrick Home for Children for many years and was the medical director and senior vice president of HSU's Fairleigh Dickenson Science Research Center. With her husband Ed, an oilman and former state Democratic Executive Committee Chairman, she traveled widely, using the trips abroad to visit Baptist missionaries and study their work. She also spent time as a medical missionary in Venezuela. Upon her husband's death in 1975, she became president of Connally Oil Company. She received numerous honors from HSU, including the Distinguished Alumna Award, the Keeter Alumni Service Award, an Honorary Doctor of Humanities Degree, induction into the university's Hall of Leaders and being named the inaugural recipient of the James B. Simmons Award. She



established the Connally Endowed Professorship of Missions at HSU in 1981, which was upgraded to a Chair of Missions in 1988. She provided the lead gift in the establishment of the Connally Missions Center on the HSU campus, which was dedicated in 2000. She became a trustee of the university in 1977, serving until 1987, and then became a member of the school's board of development. She served on the original advisory board of the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation, and she was instrumental in the Mission Texas effort to start 2,000 churches in the state between 1985 and 2000. She received both a Distinguished Service Award and the Texas Baptist Legacy Award from the Baptist General Convention of Texas. She was active in numerous civic organizations in Abilene. She was a member of First Baptist Church in Abilene since 1933, and she was one of the first women to serve as a deacon there. She was preceded in death by her husband. She is survived by a daughter, Genna Davis, and by two step-children, Edwina Roberts and Aubrey Connally.