

Samuel Moore Walton

Missouri '40

Oxford Cup Roll N° 016

The man whom *Fortune* magazine headlined as “America’s Master Merchandiser,” Sam Walton, rarely procrastinated and seldom was even behind schedule; but he was about seven years late in receiving his Oxford Cup.

When the Beta Board of Trustees introduced this way of recognizing Betas who had risen to the very pinnacle of their profession, one of the first selected was Sam Walton, who had created the Wal-Mart chain and with it emerged to be hailed by *The Wall Street Journal* as “one of the most influential retailers of this century.” They scheduled presentation for the 1985 Beta Convention. Some Wal-Mart emergency interfered.

Repeatedly, a new presentation date would be scheduled and postponed. Eventually the board delegated Past President Burton W. Folsom, *Nebraska '49*, to deliver the award whenever and wherever Walton would stand still long enough to receive it, and to heck with ceremony.

Ultimately a presentation was scheduled for October 7, 1991, at the Wal-Mart headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas. Again something came up. Beta magazine Editor John R. McClung, Jr., described the outcome in the Winter 1992 issue: “The ceremony therefore turned out to be a breakfast and presentation at the local Day’s Inn. Complete with apologies for the roadblocks thrown in the way, Brother Walton gave assurances he was truly flattered . . . and said the Oxford Cup would be prominently displayed in his office. His only regrets were that the award could not have been made in the presence of Betas from all chapters who could hear his expression of pride.”

The article noted: “When Sam Walton entered Missouri and pledged Beta in the mid-1930s, he was not much, if any, different than most of his other classmates, lucky to be there in those depression times. Growing up, he (was) the youngest Eagle Scout in Missouri at the time and later, quarterback of the state champion high school football team . . . You could add student council president and being a pretty fair tennis player.”

He took a job after graduation as management trainee for J. C. Penny Co. at \$85 a month. In 1945, on borrowed money, he opened a Ben Franklin store in Newport, Ark. His brother *Bud* soon afterward opened another in Versailles, Mo. They increased the number to nine, then opened the first Wal-Mart in 1962. Before 1970, they owned 30 stores under the two names. In greater detail than space allows here, the extraordinary story of the growth of the Wal-Mart chain is told in his own book, *Sam Walton: Made in America*, written with John Huey.

A count in 1992 placed the total at 1,735 Wal-Marts and 212 Sam’s Wholesale Club warehouses. Sales for 1991 totaled almost \$44 billion. Stock first issued in 1970 had split nine times. Brother Walton was the nation’s largest retailer.

But a combination of hairy-cell leukemia and a bone marrow cancer became too much for him. He died at 74 in Little Rock, April 5, 1992.

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