

The Joe B. and Louise P. Cook Foundation

The Cook Foundation was established by Louise and Joe Cook of Houston, Texas, so that the kinds of charitable giving they did in their lifetime could continue and grow after their deaths. Their daughter and granddaughter, Barbara Cook Wendland and Carol Wendland, of Temple, Texas, are its trustees, as was their son-in-law, Erroll Wendland, until his death in 2018. The Foundation seeks to promote community improvement and social change, especially in the areas of education, the arts, religion, and health care.

Louise Patterson was born in Malvern, Arkansas, in Hot Spring County, and attended public schools there. When she graduated from Malvern High School in 1923, she received a tuition scholarship to the University of Arkansas because she was valedictorian. Even with this help, however, her parents, who were hoping to educate her two younger brothers, could not afford to send her to college. Louise's mother, Clara Hunnicutt Patterson, a piano teacher, had already sold her piano to get the money for Louise's graduation expenses, including the white fabric for making her graduation dress. Not wanting to give up, Louise wrote the university president and asked about working her way through college. He replied that she would need \$320 for the year's room and board, and that there were no jobs available for women. That news ended her hope of attending college. She went to work at the Bank of Malvern, then in 1925 moved with her family to Shreveport, Louisiana.

Meanwhile, Joe Cook had grown up in East Texas, near Gilmer, in Upshur County, as the youngest of five children. Their father died when Joe was only six months old, leaving his mother to run the family farm. When Joe was seven, the family moved into town. Financial need kept his three brothers from finishing high school, but Joe was determined. After graduating from Gilmer High School in 1917, just before his sixteenth birthday, he took the train to Austin and entered the University of Texas, which had about 3500 students and the only school of business administration in Texas. Joe arrived on the day when Governor Jim Ferguson was impeached. He had the flu during the 1917-18 epidemic in which many people died, and he experienced the disruptions that World War I brought to the university. He played clarinet in a dance band and held various other jobs to pay his college expenses. One job with the telephone company required climbing poles to make repairs during the daytime, then operating a switchboard at night. In 1921, Joe received one of the first 100 B.B.A. degrees given by the University of Texas.

After graduation, Joe held accounting jobs in Dallas, Houston, and Gilmer. Then he decided to get a job on a ship and see the world. He left Gilmer for New Orleans in 1924, intending to sail to Europe, Asia, and Africa. While staying overnight in Shreveport, however, he read a newspaper ad that persuaded him to take a temporary job there to earn some extra money before going on. While working at the Louisiana Oil and Refining Company offices there, he met Louise, a secretary in the same office. They married in 1929, one month before the stock market crash, just after Joe had started a new job with Woodley Petroleum Company. At the height of the Depression, in 1933, the Cooks' only child, Barbara, was born. They moved to Houston in 1935 when Woodley moved its offices there, and lived there the rest of their lives. After Joe retired in 1960 as Woodley's vice president and treasurer, the Cooks concentrated on investments, philanthropy, and travel. They read constantly, traveled widely, had many interests, and were always curious.



**Louise Patterson Cook (1905-1989)
and Joe Berry Cook (1901-1990)
on their 55th wedding anniversary
September 1, 1984**

Louise Cook never got to attend college, and it was a struggle for Joe, but they never stopped educating themselves, and their main desire for the Foundation was to promote education. They lived frugally, invested carefully, and then used many of their hard-earned financial resources to help deserving students gain access to a quality college education, and to help educational institutions improve their quality through programs such as endowed chairs. Scholarship programs they established included a fund at the University of Arkansas for students from Hot Spring County, where Louise grew up, and one at Kilgore College in Texas for students from Upshur County, where Joe grew up. They also supported Lon Morris College, a Methodist college in Jacksonville, Texas. They established professorships in mathematics and in business at the University of Texas in Austin, and endowed a scholarship fund at the Texas Interscholastic League Foundation. The Cook Foundation has also made major gifts to libraries and literacy programs, reflecting the Cooks' love of reading and their awareness of libraries' value for lifelong education.

In addition, the Cooks wanted the Foundation to support the work of the United Methodist Church. Both Joe and Louise Cook grew up in churchgoing Methodist families. They were active members of St. Paul's Methodist Church in Houston from 1935 until their deaths, and made numerous gifts to Methodist congregations, new-church development programs, retirement homes, and mission projects. The Wendlands are also lifelong Methodists, and the Foundation continues to make gifts to church-related institutions and programs, now focusing mainly on progressive theology and justice issues. Together with the Cook Foundation, the Wendlands have endowed a professorship at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Following Methodism's original commitment to education and social change, the Wendlands now seek to support churches and other groups that are actively working to expand community involvement and human rights, especially in Texas. They urge organizations that receive Foundation gifts

- to commit to explicit policies of diversity and inclusion, using modern, nonsexist language, including women and minorities in leadership, and welcoming all kinds of people;
- to promote a forward-looking interpretation of Christianity, reflecting modern critical biblical scholarship and an emphasis on justice, compassion, and nonviolence; and
- to use funds not only for administration and salaries, but for program content that will educate the general public, gain community visibility, and inspire people to take action.

For more on these principles, see Barbara's independent website, www.connectionsonline.org.

The Cooks also wanted the Foundation to promote classical music and the fine arts, and to support medical research aimed at conquering illnesses such as cancer and heart disease. In keeping with these aims, the Cook Foundation has made gifts to arts organizations and to medical institutions. The Wendlands are especially interested in helping to increase access to quality classical music and health care in Texas communities.

Louise and Joe Cook wanted their foundation's gifts to institutions to bear fruit through generations, and wanted individual grant recipients to use their resources eventually to do for others what the Cooks had done for them. The Wendlands share that wish, and hope also that grant recipients will use their Foundation gifts to work for long-term social improvement.

The Cook Foundation has no paid staff and does not generally accept or reply to unsolicited requests for funds. However, the Wendlands are always glad to receive ideas, suggestions, comments, and reports on what grant recipients have accomplished and what they plan for the future.

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Barbara Cook Wendland and Carol Wendland, trustees

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