



# The Kenan-Flagler Family

How the Kenan-Flagler  
Business School got its name.



UNC  
KENAN-FLAGLER  
BUSINESS SCHOOL

# Kenan-Flagler

1730

The Kenan family migrated to North Carolina from Ireland.

1793

James Kenan immediately lent his support and became one of the founding trustees of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

1880s

In the next 25 years, Henry M. Flagler built The Florida East Coast Railroad from Jacksonville to Key West.

1901

Henry M. Flagler married Mary Lily Kenan in Kenansville, North Carolina.

1913

Henry Flagler died in 1913.

1917

Mary Lily Flagler died in 1917 and left the bulk of her fortune to her brother, William, and her two sisters, Jessie and Sarah.

1926

William Kenan donated Kenan Memorial Stadium to honor his parents.

1965

William Kenan created The William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust at the time of his death.

1991

The business school was officially named Kenan-Flagler Business School in 1991 because of substantial gifts from the Kenan Charitable Trust and the Kenan Family.

Let's start with Kenan, the name of a family who migrated to North Carolina from Ireland in 1730. Though originally from Scotland, the Kenans moved to Ireland in the late 17th century probably because of religious persecution and wars between Scotland and England.

The family settled in Wilmington and then worked its way up the Cape Fear River and the Northeast Cape Fear where they received generous land grants from King George. Thomas Kenan and his two brothers, Felix and William, started the family in this country. Thomas had one son, James Kenan, who was keenly interested in education. When the first public state university was being discussed, James Kenan immediately lent his support and became one of the founding trustees of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 1793 he gave the princely sum of \$50. Since then, six generations of the family have attended Carolina.

The name Rockefeller is almost a household name in this country. But the name Flagler is virtually unknown, even though John D. Rockefeller and Henry M. Flagler were co-founders of the great Standard Oil Company. As Standard Oil grew into one of the largest industrial complexes in the world, Rockefeller took the limelight, whereas Flagler shunned publicity. Rockefeller is quoted as saying that it was his partner, Flagler, whose keen mind had more to do with the growth of the oil business than he did.

After amassing a fortune in Standard Oil and remaining one of the largest stockholders, Flagler retired from Standard Oil at the age of 67 and took his sickly wife, Mary Harkness Flagler, to Florida to escape the harsh winter in New York. In the 1880s, Florida was a virtual wilderness. No transportation of any kind existed below Jacksonville and St. Augustine.

Flagler had a vision and saw the possibilities of creating a winter resort for his northern friends. In the next 25 years, Flagler built The Florida East Coast Railroad from Jacksonville to Key West. He built nine resort hotels, including one in Nassau, and bought the local newspapers, including the *Miami Herald*. Flagler created water and electric light companies that eventually grew into Florida Power and Light Company, and he created land companies to manage the vast acreage that the government gave him for each mile of railroad track. Later he bought and expended the P. & O. Steamship Company to transport passengers and freight between Miami, West Palm Beach and Nassau and Cuba. All these companies were collectively called The Flagler System.

Flagler's personal life was not as successful. His first wife, Mary Harkness, died, leaving him only one child, a son, who survived. His second wife, Ida Alice, developed a mental illness and had to be committed to a sanitarium in New York State. Flagler, while visiting his friend Pembroke Jones in Wilmington, North Carolina, met Mary Lily Kenan, whose family members were friends of the Joneses.

Even though Mary Lily was 30 years younger than Flagler, a romance started that culminated in their eventual marriage in 1901 in Kenansville, North Carolina. They were married almost 13 years before Flagler died in 1913. Mary Lily Flagler then became one of the wealthiest women in the country. Her brother, William, had graduated from The University of North Carolina and had been working for Flagler as a special consultant in his engineering division.

Mary Lily Flagler did not live long after her husband died. She died in 1917 and left the bulk of her fortune to her brother, William, and her two sisters, Jessie and Sarah. Their family attachment to The University of North Carolina was strong and continued during their lifetime. Mary Lily Kenan established The Kenan Professorship Endowment in 1917. William Kenan donated Kenan Memorial Stadium to honor his parents in 1926 and created The William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust at his death in 1965. This trust created the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professorships not only at UNC-Chapel Hill but at 56 universities throughout the country.

UNC-Chapel Hill's business school was officially named Kenan-Flagler Business School in 1991 because of substantial gifts from the Kenan Charitable Trust and the Kenan Family. Frank H. Kenan, William Kenan's cousin, was responsible for the building of The Kenan Center, and creating the new business school on its present campus. The Frank Hawkins Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise is housed in the Kenan Center as are the offices of the William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust and the four William R. Kenan, Jr. Funds.

The portraits on the front cover of Henry M. Flagler and Mary Lily Kenan Flagler hang in the McColl Building lobby at UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School. Also on display are the marble bust of Flagler, original Standard Oil Company certificates and a land deed that contains what is now the heart of Miami, Florida.



Henry Flagler built the Florida East Coast Railroad from Jacksonville to Key West. In addition to the railroad, Flagler owned the local newspapers, electric and light companies, and nine resort hotels. Flagler's companies were collectively called The Flagler System.

## UNC Kenan-Flagler

Consistently ranked one of the world's best business schools, UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School is known for experiential learning in leadership and teamwork, superior teaching, innovative research and a collaborative culture.

Our commitment to developing socially responsible, results-driven leaders distinguishes our programs. We educate people at every stage of their careers and prepare them to manage successfully in the global business environment. We offer five MBA programs: Full-time MBA, Evening MBA, Weekend MBA, OneMBA® and our online program, MBA@UNC. We also offer Master of Accounting, undergraduate business, PhD and nondegree Executive Development programs. Our Frank Hawkins Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise helps business and government tackle problems with impact on society through operations in Chapel Hill and Bangkok.



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