Stanford University historian George Knoles ’28, ’30, was a noted authority on our nation’s history—from Civil War battles to the legacy of the Jazz Age. He personally witnessed some of the 20th century’s most significant moments, including the hardship of the Great Depression and World War II as a U.S. Navy lieutenant. At 107, Knoles was also Pacific’s oldest alumnus.

But he didn’t forget his own past as a member of a pioneering Pacific family: He was the son of legendary Pacific President Tully Knoles, who moved Pacific from San Jose to Stockton in 1924, and was also a member of the inaugural class in Stockton.

Over the years, George Knoles and his late wife, Amandalee Barker ’30, had donated generously to endow graduate fellowships for women in history and the humanities at their alma mater. In August, Knoles saw to it that a final gift was transferred to the endowment—just days before his death at his Palo Alto home.

To boost its impact, his last gift qualifies for dollar-for-dollar matching funds from the $125 million Powell Fund, the historic endowed fund set up by the late Regents Robert and Jeannette Powell. The match doubles the Knoles gift, allowing the Barker-Knoles endowment to award an annual scholarship of more than $34,000 to a student.

“George and Amandalee deeply believed that women should enjoy the same academic opportunities, as students and educators, as their male counterparts,” Pacific President Pamela Eibeck said. “They opened the door for many women to pursue graduate education by funding an endowment that will live on for many years to come.”
Education SpanS a Family—and GenderS

Education had played an important role in the personal and professional history of Knoles and his family, all of whom shared close ties to Pacific. His father, Tully, became President of what was then College of the Pacific in 1919. The elder Knoles oversaw the institution’s move from its original location in San Jose to Stockton in 1924, helped raise vital funding in tough economic times and was a popular presence around campus. He served as President for 27 years, and another 13 years as Chancellor.

It sometimes became a family affair, especially during a time when campus living was decidedly more rustic. Once on a Saturday night, President Knoles called on his three eldest sons, including George, to coax down a cow that student pranksters had somehow led to the third floor of the men’s dormitory, leaving a trail behind her, of course. According to former provost Phil Gilbertson, who has written a comprehensive history of the University, President Knoles encouraged a spirit of friendliness across campus, and he loved to joke around with students and colleagues alike. But he was serious when it came to education and equal opportunities for women.

Tully Knoles and his wife, Emily, had promised each of their eight children—five boys and three girls—a college education, including through their master’s degrees. All eight children took their parents up on the offer, and each of them went on to become a lifelong educator.

George Knoles’ future wife, Amandalee, was also promised an education. Her parents helped her through her undergraduate years—but when the family’s finances became tight, her brother’s education took priority.

Pacific was already a welcoming place for women to learn and teach in those days, a rarity compared with other college campuses. Women accounted for 40 percent of the school’s faculty at the time of its 1924 move to Stockton. And female students took part in the student association from its start back in 1899.

In 1977, Emily Knoles, George’s mother, was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from the University. As she approached her 100th birthday, the recommendation letter noted Emily’s one regret was that she never obtained a college degree. The next year, her friends and relatives established a scholarship fund in her honor.

“What a beautiful way to advance and perpetuate some of the educational ideals that meant so much to Tully and me throughout our association with Pacific!” Emily wrote in a thank-you letter to the University.

Years later, when her son, George, and daughter-in-law, Amandalee, were in their 80s, they established the Barker-Knoles Endowed Scholarship to help boost educational opportunities for female students.

IT All Started at Pacific

While earning his bachelor’s and master’s degrees, George Knoles played men’s basketball and was a member of the Omega Phi Alpha fraternity. It was at Pacific that he met Amandalee, who was in the class behind his and working on a bachelor’s degree in education. The couple wed inside the memorial church at Stanford, where Knoles was earning his doctorate in history, and they moved to Palo Alto in 1935.

When World War II called, he served as a U.S. Navy lieutenant in the Pacific Fleet. In later years, he returned several times to teach and rebuild relationships between Japanese and American scholars.

After the war, Knoles returned to teach at Stanford, starting out as an assistant and rising to become the Margaret Byrne Professor of American History and department chair before retiring in 1972. He wrote several well-received historical texts, along with many journal...
articles and book reviews. One of his books, *Readings in Western Civilization*, which he coauthored with fellow Stanford professor Rixford Snyder, became a standard college text.

Amandalee worked as a schoolteacher and administrator from 1943 to 1956, serving as a school principal in Menlo Park. According to the *Stanford Report*, she gave up her career in order to help her husband in his. Knoles said she acted as a sort of “den mother” when the couple went to Stanford study centers in France, Germany and England. She went with him also to Japan, where he spent several yearlong stints teaching and strengthening the bond between Eastern and Western educators.

Amandalee died in 2004, at age 96, at Channing House, the same Palo Alto senior community where she and her husband had lived together and where he spent his final days.

ConnEctinG to thE paSt, lookinG to thE FuturE

George Knoles greeted visitors from Pacific warmly in recent years. He continued to follow the news about goings-on at Pacific, through the *Pacific Review* and other sources, remarking upon President Pamela Eibeck’s appointment that it was high time the University had a female president. In 1995 he gifted Pacific with family memorabilia that are now part of the University’s archives.

Knoles’ daughter, Ann Nitzan, said her father had talked a great deal about adding to the Barker-Knoles Endowed Scholarship and she and sister Laurie Simmons were delighted he was able to do so before he passed away.

On Aug. 22, Knoles made a final transfer to the endowment. On Aug. 27, he died peacefully at the Channing House, having enjoyed visits from his many friends.

If the historian were to wonder about his impact on Pacific’s future, all Knoles had to do was read the letter of gratitude that Melissa Keane ’11, ’12 wrote to him in August 2011.

As a third-year recipient of the Barker-Knoles Endowed Scholarship, Keane was then finishing up her doctorate in educational and school psychology in the Gladys L. Benerd School of Education. She said the award had made it possible for her to continue her studies, something for which she would be eternally grateful.

“Because of you, I feel that I am getting the education that I need to lead a very successful and fulfilling life. I promise that I will strive to help others as you have helped me.” —Melissa Keane ’11, ’12

Amandalee died in 2004, at age 96, at Channing House, the same Palo Alto senior community where she and her husband had lived together and where he spent his final days.

Knoles is survived by two daughters, Ann Nitzan, of Portola Valley, and Laurie Simmons, of Monterey; five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. A memorial service at First Methodist Church was held in Palo Alto on Oct. 25. Donations can be made to the Barker-Knoles Scholarship at University of the Pacific, 3601 Pacific Ave., Stockton, CA 95211.