

The Old Bicycle Shop on Gifford Street where Charles T. Eastman started his business career in Falmouth in 1913. Courtesy the Eastman family.

Generations of Success From A Ten Dollar Bill

Kathy Sharp Frisbee

Seventy-eight years ago, in 1913, when Falmouth was a small country town with horses and buggies clapping and rumbling along Main Street and steamers plying the local waters, a 37-year-old resident named Charles Eastman, known by everyone as "Charlie," made a momentous personal decision based on confidence in himself and his conviction that bicycles would continue to be necessary for transportation. He resigned his position as manager of the Falmouth Plumbing and Hardware Company where he had worked for seven years, and promptly invested a ten dollar bill in his own small enterprise. In a barn behind his home on Gifford Street, he opened a modest bicycle sales and service shop and called it simply "The Old Bicycle Shop."

Charlie was a gentle man with the grit, wit, and trading instincts that contributed to the kind of business success few people have known, but everyone values. It was a success based on hard work, honest effort, respect for others, and dry humor. While Charlie's goal was to provide for his family, it was likewise to serve his community by selling a wide assortment of basic products, providing value for his customers, and using trustworthy business practices. The dream he dreamed in 1913 has become an enduring reality on Main Street and a tribute to traditions. Its character and integrity have been upheld through three generations and are maintained today by his grandson, Charles Elwood Eastman, Jr., known to everyone as "Chuck."

Charles Thomas Eastman was born in February, 1876, to Thomas C. and Sarah Gardner Eastman of Milford, Massachusetts. Like most children of his generation, Charlie cut his baby teeth on industry and ingenuity

from watching his mother manage home responsibilities and his father run a gristmill, a pasteboard and shoe box manufacturing industry, and a watch repair service.

As a young man, Charlie learned to repair bicycles while working at a Milford bicycle business. In 1903, at age 27, he struck out on his own to experience a wider scope of hardware business operations in Uxbridge, Massachusetts and Woonsocket, Rhode Island. In September, 1904, he married Lura Sturtevant of Milford, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin C. Sturtevant.

In 1906, Charlie and Lura moved to Falmouth where Charlie had accepted a management position with the Falmouth Plumbing and Hardware Company. They arrived in April on Patriot's Day, a day they long remembered for the inviting band music being played on Village Green, the colorful flag decorations, and the air of gaiety that excited the whole town. The next year, 1907, brought the birth of their first son, Thomas A. (Tom).

Six years later, on April 4, 1913, Charlie took the big leap from serving as store manager for a large, established business to starting his own business endeavor. There was no time for worry or second thoughts in those early days as business was brisk. In the first nine days of operation, he sold eighteen bicycles and received numerous bicycle service orders. His instinct had been right as bicycles continued to be a proven and popular means of transportation despite that revolutionary mode of transportation called the automobile, which was gradually coming into use.

By mid-July, Charlie saw that business expansion would soon be necessary. Plans were made for construction to begin in the spring of 1914 on two stores that would comprise the Eastman Building on Main Street east of the Village Green. Charlie had purchased the site from a prominent landholder of the time, Henry H. Fay of Boston. Years before, Joseph Ray, a Black, who transported the mail in a sailboat from the Old Stone dock to Vineyard Haven, had occupied a dwelling there. In 1858, it was the site of a paint shop operated by Watson Shiverick, with adjacent space serving as Dr. Thayer's drug store.

In July, 1914, Charlie moved his bicycle shop to its new Main Street quarters. In the store next door, Harry J. San Souci opened a barbershop, which was to remain there for 24 years. By the winter of 1914, Charlie had acquired sufficient credit to diversify his business and

offer his customers not only bicycles, but hardware, paints, and general merchandise.

Charlie's property was sizable enough to accommodate more stores. In 1916, he added another shop and the post office moved in with George W. Jones serving as postmaster. An idea for the Eastman Block's next development phase came during one of those informal business meetings of the times, a morning when summer resident and textile manufacturer Russell H. Leonard reclined with lathered face in one of Harry San Souci's barber chairs, now and then tossing ideas around with Charlie, who sat in the next chair, and with Harry's brother, Adelard, who stood nearby.

The result of that meeting was the opening of The Ipswich Hosiery Shop, later known as The Lady Pepperell Shop, which carried fine linen Pepperell products manufactured by Russell's firm. Shortly



Eastman's Hardware Store in 1924 showing Shiverick's Pond in background. The new Tudor style building was a copy of a fishmonger's shop in Falmouth, England. The building housed the post office, a barbershop, the Ipswich Hosiery Shop, as well as the hardware store. Courtesy the Eastman family.

thereafter, Miriam Gould opened a beauty shop next to the San Souci barbershop, Charlie's hardware store expanded, and new rooms were built above the shops for additional tenants.

The distinctive English Tudor front of the Eastman Block resulted from an architectural recommendation to Charlie by Mr. and Mrs. Leonard in the mid-1920s as part of their agreement to acquire store space. While on a trip to Falmouth, England, and strolling the streets of that English seaside resort in Cornwall, from which Falmouth, Massachusetts took its name, the Leonards photographed a 17th century fishmonger's shop, and later shared the photos with Charlie. He agreed with the Leonards that a touch of the Old World rightfully deserved a place on Main Street in the New World, and so they commissioned architect Joseph D. Leland to direct the construction of this classic English design.

Willie Cavanaugh built the renovation. Elmer Davis, a mason, excavated the building's cellar for Cavanaugh. During the excavation, Elmer discovered a coin that bore the engraved signature of George III and was determined to be more than 100 years old.

Between 1929 and 1938, more shops were built. The new tenants were Dr. K.A. Bohaker, a dentist; George Sands, a monument builder; Herbert Hunziker, an attorney; Gilbert Boone, a specialist in Cape Cod architecture; and the Succanessett Club for businessmen.

The birth of Charlie's second son, Charles Elwood (Elwood), came in 1914. Both Tom and Elwood learned their father's business early by observing and working with him at the store after school and during school breaks. They were constantly amazed by him.

"My earliest memory of going to the hardware store was when I was three years old, the day my father agreed to get me out of my mother's hair and rode me to the store in a little wooden box on the front of his bicycle," said Elwood. "Another thing I recall about my father

is that he would sell anything. I remember he told a man who was very interested in buying his copper tub in the kitchen at home that he would sell it to him Saturday evening after our baths. He kept his word, and my mother was furious," laughed Elwood.

Both boys kept the memory of their mother fresh throughout their lives by maintaining small, formal English flower gardens at their homes, just as she did at the family's Gifford Street home. Her garden, which had been laid out by her brother, Frank, was of such color and variety that she often received garden club awards. The boys' gardens were likewise captivating, leaving no doubt that they had inherited her green thumb touch with horticulture.

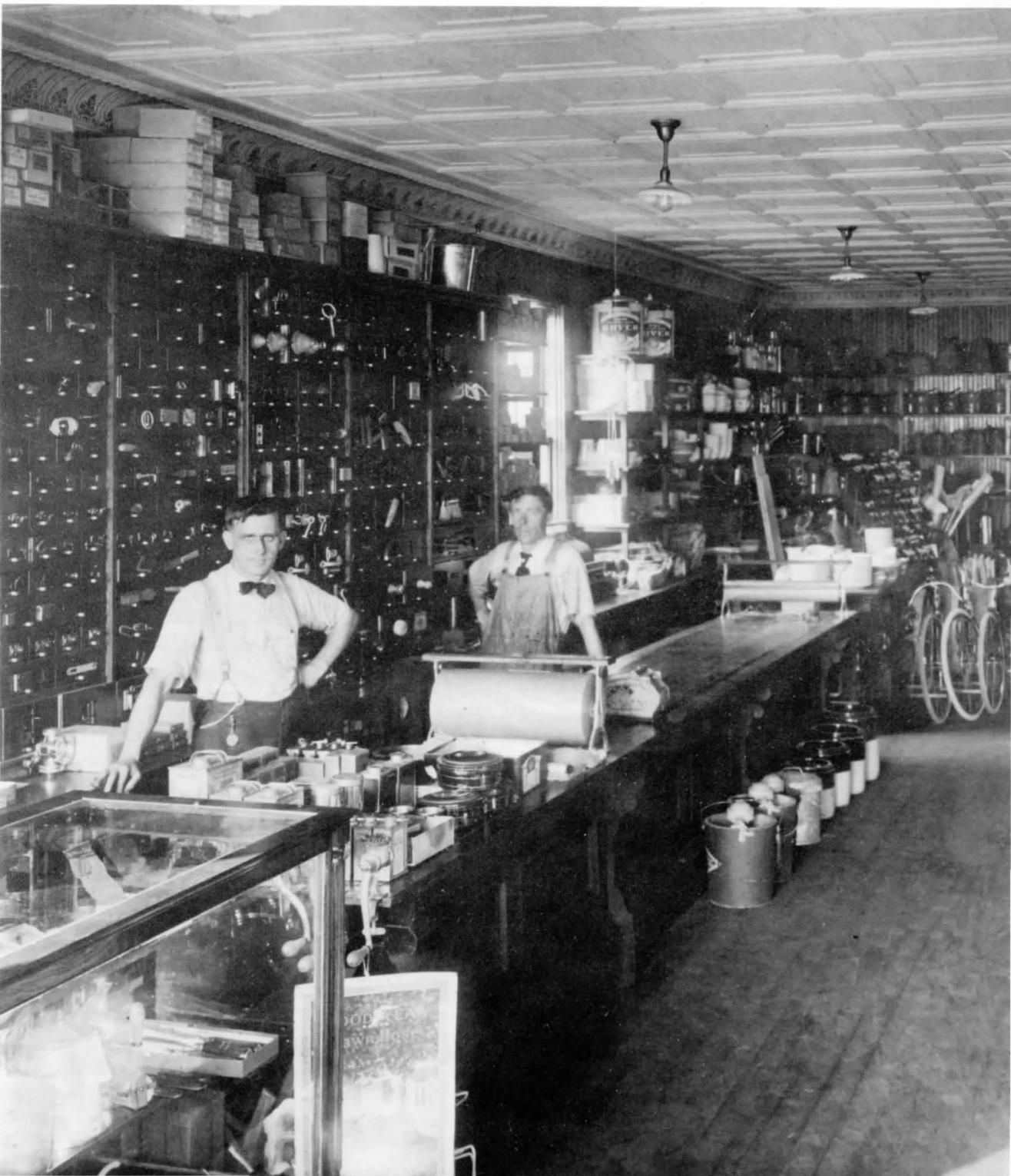
"How very well I remember Mother, especially on Saturdays," said Tom. "That was the day I always had to pare apples for her pies."

Tom became more fully involved in the family's business when he was fourteen. Active in school in both classwork and sports, he took to business management just like his father.

"Tom was a go-getter, more numbers-minded. I was bashful in school, less seriously interested in my studies and more mechanically inclined," said Elwood.

While Elwood focused on the mechanical services of the business, Tom expanded the operations into sporting goods, clothing, and gift items, prompting some people to call the store the second L.L. Bean Company. Their diversified inventory now encompassed hardware, paints, kitchen furnishings, electric refrigerators, oil burners, fishing tackle, a complete line of sporting goods, farm and garden seeds, lawn mower repair service, and bicycle sales and service.

The largest segment of their clientele was the caretakers of the area's ever-growing number of summer estates. The Eastmans found that their busiest season ran from June 15 to Labor Day, when the area's population





during the decades of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, jumped from 5,000 to 16,000. The numbers have since been on the rise and in recent years the increase in seasonal population has been from 20,000 in winter to 60,000 and more in summer, according to the Falmouth Chamber of Commerce. Their second busiest period then and today was between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

After-Christmas winter business trickled in those early decades, often bringing in only \$10 a day. Locals would frequently charge their purchases, making handshake agreements to see Charlie "at strawberry time," when they could earn enough wages to pay him by harvesting the local strawberry fields. To keep busy, Charlie would sell crates of apples up and down the Cape. Years later, Tom carried on the tradition of outside sales during slow business months, but instead of apples, he sold sporting goods.

In those early decades of the century Shivericks Pond abutted the hardware store and skaters often stopped by to have their skate blades sharpened. Later in the war years of the 1940s, Friday nights were the big shopping nights, attracting many of the 69,000 soldiers and their family members assigned to Camp Edwards in North Falmouth. They were also the years when fishermen would stop by the hardware store to simply swap stories.

"I remember we would have batches of popcorn loaded with butter for anyone coming in the store, and we would all just stand around and talk with people as they came in," recalled Tom in an interview in 1989, just a few months before his death at age 82.

Charlie Eastman and clerk at the counter of Eastman's Hardware Store. Note the prodigious inventory of paints, pots and pans, tools, and bicycles, as well as the tin-pressed ceiling and hardwood floor. Circa 1918. Courtesy the Eastman family.

Tom had married Marion Norris of Woods Hole in 1929. In 1935, Elwood met Frances E. Caswell of Hyannis at an Onset Big Bands Show that she attended with her girlfriends. One meeting was all it had taken for Elwood to make up his mind. In 1938, they were married.

"She finally saved enough money for us to get married," teased Elwood.

Another noteworthy event occurred in 1938. The year marked the 25th anniversary of the family business, and to celebrate, Charlie wrote and published a booklet about the family business. He entitled it *The Growth of a Ten Dollar Bill*. He also organized a number of summer events and distributed Norway spruces to his customers to show gratitude to his patrons and his staff.

In his booklet, he took the opportunity to acknowledge pride in his staff with special appreciation conveyed to Harry A. Gould, who had ably handled "the first real set of books which the growing business required" and had been "a loyal and appreciated assistant" since 1916. Likewise acknowledged was Ted Czepiel, a "capable assistant" and John E. Ellery, "the very efficient accountant." The list was not complete without extending gratitude and appreciation to his sons—Tom, "who stands at the top in sporting goods and fishing supplies" and Elwood "in charge of the shop repairing all kinds of lawn mowers and bicycles."

In 1940, Elwood decided to try his own entrepreneurial adventure after talking to his friend, Brownly Nickerson. Brownly had decided to forego his option on a certain business opportunity, but was willing to sell that option to Elwood. For just \$60, Elwood became the proud owner of six "he and she" frogs and 12 volumes of frog farm instructions from the state of Tennessee.

"They were huge things," said Frances, whom everyone calls "Fanne." With wide-eyed amazement, she recalled that the frogs, "full spread, seemed almost

human height head to toe! And were they ever cross-looking. Made you want to run a mile!"

For five weeks, Elwood and another friend followed the guidebooks carefully, erecting a fence around a pond behind the house that Elwood and Fanne were renting just off Gifford Street. The plan was to harvest a bounty of frogs and sell them to the scientific institutions in Woods Hole where they were needed for research studies, and to local restaurateurs as dinner delicacies.

"I told Fanne I would soon get her the prettiest fur coat there was," Elwood remembered with a laugh.

The first night they put the frogs in the pond, they heard "the most awful racket." It happened the second night too. The thought that preyed on Elwood's mind then was how he wished Brownly would hurry up and bring him that 13th volume of instructions. A day or so later, they discovered what had been causing all the commotion.

"Squirrels, birds, snakes, raccoons, you name it, had feasted on the pollywogs, and the big frogs had gotten away," moaned Elwood.

Shortly thereafter, Brownly delivered the missing volume. To Elwood's numbing disbelief, the final instructions stressed the necessity of top-screening the pond to keep other animals out and away from the frogs.

No sooner had Elwood turned his focus back to the hardware business than World War II broke out. He enlisted, was assigned to the Seabees, and was shipped out to the Marshall Islands. Tom continued to run the store with Charlie, Harry Gould, Ted Czepiel, and John Ellery.

In 1944, while Elwood was still away with the war, Charlie died of a heart attack. His loss was felt far and wide. An editorial in *The Falmouth Enterprise* lauded Charles Thomas Eastman as a man who "became a dean among our businessmen, a veteran of Main

Street, knowing everybody, and known to everybody.” Tom kept the business going until Elwood’s return in 1945.

Ten years later, in 1955, Tom decided to focus solely on operating the lawn mower side of the business and to sell area real estate on his own. Elwood thus assumed full responsibility for the store’s daily operations.

During that time, Elwood and Fanne moved from their modest \$20 a month rental home off Gifford Street to a large colonial-style home in The Moors, a home they jokingly called their “Glamour Manor.” But their stay in The Moors was short-lived mainly because “it was out in nowhere then and a very lonely place to be,” said Fanne. So they bought a traditional Cape-style home along Pin Oak Way, a street which is lined with pin oak trees and bordered by Siders Pond. They have lived there for the past 44 years.

In the mid-1960s, a number of Falmouth businesses experienced a rash of arsonist attacks, which left store owners tense and fearful. One Tuesday night, the arsonist threw a Molotov cocktail through the Eastman’s hardware store window. The resulting smoke and fire damage was enough to cripple, but not stop operations for two weeks. While repairs were made, a fire sale was held and merchandise was restocked.

“It was a time when you really knew your friends,” said Fanne. “While we stayed at the store all that night of the fire, aiding the fire department as best we could as they battled the flames and then during the aftermath, friends came by again and again with food and words of support,” said Fanne.

Community response to the Eastmans was a natural reflex to the genuine concern the Eastman generations had shown the community and not just through the family business. An active member of the Falmouth Garden Club for 35 years, Fanne has served the organization in many ways and was a popular

concessionaire for the candy booth at the annual August Nursing Fete, which for many years was held on the Village Green. The goal of this popular event was to raise funds for the Falmouth Nursing Association.

One year, Fanne arranged a holiday display in the hardware store’s front windows with the centerpiece being an elegant dollhouse that had been crafted in the Carolinas and was loaned to her by its owner, Mrs. Josephine Lilly. Fanne’s natural way with colorful window display arrangements led to the opening in 1981 of Fanne’s Gift Shop, which is located in the back of the store where fishing tackle was once sold. In a post and beam setting with pecky cyprus wall paneling and green-checked, ruffled valances at the windows, Fanne features gift items made by New England crafters.

In 1978, after Elwood and Fanne’s son, Chuck, had finished college and for a few years had tested the business world’s waters beyond Falmouth, he decided to return to the family business.

“I realized that I wanted to be self-employed rather than working for some big corporation,” said Chuck.

Chuck has since rejuvenated the store’s clothing and sporting goods department. In 1988, he reopened the family’s sport fishing tackle business in a shop across Main Street, and called it “Eastman’s Sport and Tackle.” This year, he moved the tackle business back to the Eastman Building in the 1,000 square foot basement, which has its own nostalgic atmosphere in the high ceiling of exposed original wood joists and beams. Said Chuck, “Finally it is where it should be, all under one roof.”

Though Chuck says he enjoys seeing the business come full circle to the trade character his grandfather developed, today he confronts a very different marketplace.

The GROWTH of a TEN DOLLAR BILL

1913  1938

FALMOUTH
MASSACHUSETTS



Cover of the 25th anniversary booklet of Eastman's Hardware Store, published in 1938. Courtesy the Eastman family.

Excerpts from: *The Growth of a Ten Dollar Bill*

by Charles T. Eastman

His place of business was in a barn on Gifford street. In the first 150 working days a new or used bicycle was sold every day. Cold weather came but the bicycle business continued. The proprietor, working in a cold barn in heavy felt boots, serviced the townspeople's cycles, and on March 21, 1914 during a raging blizzard sold 6 cycles which were ridden out into a blinding snow storm. The bicycles must certainly have been a good value for the price, to be sold under such conditions.

This Succanessett Club was organized forty-odd years ago by a group of prominent business men and its first president was George E. Dean who is now president of the Falmouth National Bank. The purpose of the club is to give the citizens and residents of Falmouth the best possible service and value in all business dealings. The members are really the purchasing agents for their customers. Any resident of, or visitor to Falmouth may consult with the members of this club and is assured of absolutely fair dealing. Any possible complaint is investigated and adjusted by the Club. Mr. Henry G. Haddon is the president and offers the services of the club officers to residents and summer visitors.

One of the important lines added to the store in 1930 was a complete line of sporting goods. Tom Eastman, being interested in sports, readily built up and expanded this line over the entire Cape, selling to schools, private teams and leagues. Tom introduced badminton to Cape Cod and it has grown to be a very popular sport.

The Eastman Hardware Store has pioneered in new methods of merchandising which are of great advantage to its customers. One plan is the Eastman's Sporting Club. A customer who is to make a purchase of any kind of sporting goods is enrolled as a member of the club at a nominal cost of twenty-five cents—there are no dues to pay—and is entitled a liberal discount on all purchases of sporting goods. This discount could not be allowed otherwise because of trade agreements with manufacturers. The organization of the Sporting Club is an example of the Eastman Hardware Store's efforts in its customers behalf, and is part of the principle which made possible "The Growth of a Ten Dollar Bill."

The belief that "Quality is not expensive" is proven by the operation of other similar plans which work for the customer. All merchandise sold is of the better grades which cost least in the end.

The man responsible for these many advantages to Falmouth is constantly developing new plans and methods for the benefit of his townspeople and visitors, and one particular new plan is nearing completion, which is being copyrighted and will soon be announced.

Eastman's Hardware Store now sells hardware, Kyanize paints, kitchen furnishings, electric refrigerators, Florence oil burners, sport goods, fishing tackle, Chambers gas stoves, garden seeds. Its bicycle repair department is important. It has the largest hand and power mower repair business this side of Boston.



Interior view of Eastman's Hardware Store published in the 25th anniversary booklet. Courtesy the Eastman family.



End page of the anniversary booklet. Courtesy the Eastman family.

“I’ve seen Falmouth go from a small town to a small city, and a lot of community closeness as well as sporting terrain has been lost in the transition,” said Chuck. “I’ve learned that bigger is not always best, and so we strive to retain a manageable size in keeping with the image of a friendly, family-owned business.” With a fair number of fourth generation Eastmans, the family business traditions will no doubt carry on.

The Eastman Hardware Store still retains much of its turn-of-the-century character with tin-pressed ceilings, carved wood trim, polished hardwood floors, and antique tools displayed as wall art. The family business is notable not only for its historical and architectural distinction, but for being one of the oldest family-owned businesses in Falmouth. Hanging in its back office is a gallery of family photos and



A 1927 Essex parked in front of the Lady Pepperell Shop in the Eastman building, 1929. Courtesy the Eastman family.

memorabilia that mirror the times of each Eastman generation.

Then there's the big iron bull's ring hanging just above the customer counter, a reminder, Chuck says, of Charlie's humorous, no-nonsense business manner. As he stared at the ring and hefted it, he seemed suddenly drawn back in time. As a smile began to inch across his face, he said with a barely concealed chuckle, "my grandfather would hand this to a salesman when he realized the man was giving him a lot of just that."

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