



DIVIDING THE **ESTATE**



FAMILY MELTDOWN, TEXAS-STYLE

Dividing the Estate is the story of the Gordon clan, a Texas family who has been hard hit by the steep drop in oil prices in 1987. Family matriarch Stella rules over the family, but as she is 85 years old, her family smells their inheritance coming. Younger daughter Mary Jo, her husband and two daughters, come to visit for the day, prompting a family get-together. Mary Jo is deeply in debt and wants to divide the estate before her mother dies. Various members of the family, including the servants, take sides in the debate and wonder how much, if anything, there actually is to inherit.

By **HORTON FOOTE**

Directed by **JOEL FERRELL**

March 11-April 9

Dee and Charles Wyly Theatre

Dallas Theater Center's production of *Dividing the Estate* is part of the Foote Festival, a Texas-size celebration taking place across the metroplex to honor Horton Foote and his many works. The Foote Festival will kick-off on March 14 (Foote's birthday), and run through May 1, during which time various arts organizations will be presenting Horton's plays, screening film adaptations of his work, and presenting insights into his life through readings, and other related events. Partners in the Foote Festival come from from Flower Mound to Garland, Fort Worth to Dallas, representing a diverse group of artists who all wish to celebrate the life of this legendary Texas

playwright. For more information on the Foote Festival and how you can participate visit: footefestival.com



**FOOTE
FESTIVAL**
footefestival.com

**THE
STUDY
GUIDE**

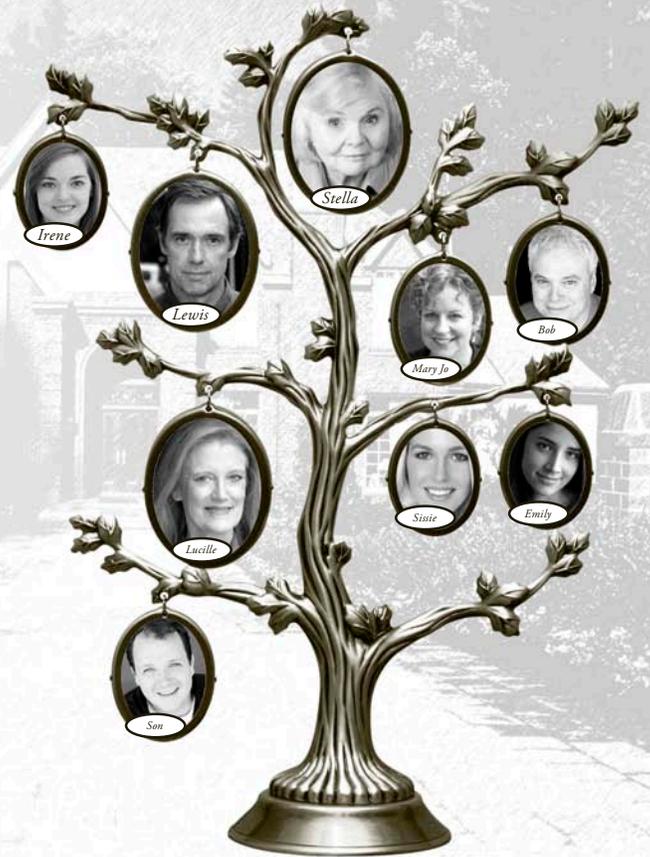
Dallas Theater Center

Harrison, Texas

Dividing the Estate is set in the small town of Harrison, Texas, where Stella Gordon and her family have deep roots. Although Harrison is a fictional place it is based on Horton Foote's hometown, Wharton, Texas, which has been the inspiration for so many Foote stories. Harrison has been the reoccurring star in Horton Foote's work. It was the setting for the playwright's first produced play, and continued to be the home

for his characters throughout Foote's career. Wharton, Texas, the "real" Harrison, can be visited today.

Located 60 miles southwest of Houston, Wharton is the small town that Horton Foote depicted in his plays, and like the Gordon Family in *Dividing the Estate*, members of Horton's family still reside in Wharton, tied to the family home and the roots they have there.



The Gordon Family Tree

Cast pictured above (left to right): June Squib (*Stella Gordon*), Katherine Bourne (*Irene Ratliff*), Kurt Rhodes (*Lewis Gordon*), Nance Williamson (*Mary Jo*), Kieran Connolly (*Bob*), Gail Cronauer (*Lucille*), Kristin Frantz (*Sissie*), Emily Habeck (*Emily*), Matthew Gray (*Son*)

HORTON FOOTE'S WORK

A Timeline for the Study Guide

Born in 1916, Horton Foote is not only one of Texas' most celebrate writers, but his body of work includes him as one of America's beloved playwrights. It all began with his first piece:

1939 - *Wharton Dance*
first play written

In the 1940s Horton Foote wrote over fifteen stage plays including:

1939 - *Texas Town*
first play performed

1944 - *In My Beginning*
a dance play,
choreographed by
Martha Graham

1944 - *Only the Heart* his
first stage play on
Broadway

1948 - *The Chase*, adapted
into a novel in 1956,
and a screenplay in
1965.

While living in Los Angeles in the 1950s, Horton Foote took to the small screen, writing over twenty teleplays and two movie screenplays including:

1953 - *The Trip to Bountiful*, stage play, adapted to the screen in 1985

The 1960s found Foote working with several screenplays, including one on his most notable:

1961 - *To Kill a Mockingbird*, screenplay

Constantly writing, Foote's largest evening of work, *The Orphan Home Cycle*, was created in the late 1970s. Conceived as one long experience, it was first produced as separate plays. They were fully produced together for the first time in 2010. Five plays in the cycle were also produced (by Foote) as movies.

1979 - *Convicts* stage play,
1991 (screenplay)

1979 - *Courtship* stage
play, 1987
(screenplay)

1979 - *Cousins* stage play

1979 - *Lily Dale* stage play,
1996 (screenplay)

1979 - *The Death of Papa*
stage play

1979 - *The Widow Claire*
stage play

1979 - *Valentine's Day*
stage play, 1986
On Valentine's Day
(screenplay)

1979 - *1918* stage play,
1985 (screenplay)

PRE WW2

Texas economy is dependent on the production of cotton, cattle, timber, and petroleum

POST WW2

Cotton declines in importance and cattle ranchers suffer due to increased production costs, while lumber production remains relatively stable.

1970s

Oil and natural gas emerges as the state's most important resource as a result of rising world petroleum prices.



About FOOTE

Albert Horton Foote, Jr.
(March 14, 1916 – March 4, 2009)
was born in Wharton, TX. Foote was an American playwright and screenwriter, perhaps best known for his Academy Award-winning screenplays for the 1962 film *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the 1983 film *Tender Mercies*, and his notable live television dramas during the Golden Age of Television. He received

the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1995 for his play *The Young Man From Atlanta*. In 1995, Foote was the inaugural recipient of the Austin Film Festival's Distinguished Screenwriter Award and was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 2000. He died on March 4th, 2009 at his family's home in Hartford, Conn.

Horton Foote: America's Storyteller

"I picked a difficult subject, a little lost Texas town no one's heard of or cares about. But I'm at the mercy of what I write. The subject matter has taken me over."

– Horton Foote

Unlike most playwrights, whose style and themes change as they age, Horton Foote never wavered from his deceptively simple stories about everyday people dealing with problems of the heart: children without fathers, parents without children, career failures and redemption through love, all in the tiny fictional town of Harrison, Texas. Through his young years writing for the stage, the 50s writing for television, the 60s and 70s writing for the silver screen and then after writing for the stage again, his stories remained what theater scholars describe as "rural" or "regional". Another famous playwright's stories were also "rural" or "regional" and Foote has been likened to him over the years; Anton Chekhov. What Foote and Chekhov held in common was an understanding that the most personal drama is the family drama, and whether it involves selling a cherry orchard or cotton plantation acreage, the anguish of giving up a part of one's heritage is the same in Russia as it is in Texas. Likewise, the youthful yearning to go out into the world, whether it is to Moscow or to Houston, in search of fame, fortune, and true love is a constant in every generation. It is these human conflicts that make the plays of Chekhov and Foote universal and speak to audiences across time. It is the drama of the commonplace, and both playwrights are masters of it.

The 1980s found Foote writing again, producing seventeen new works including another award winning film.

1983 - *Tender Mercies*, screenplay

Even during his 80s, Foote didn't stop writing and producing. He wrote seven more pieces in the 1990s, including:

1992 *Of Mice and Men*, screenplay

2000 *The Carpetbagger's Children*, stage play

In the last decade of his life we see some of Foote's strongest works, including the production you'll see at Dallas Theater Center this year and a movie which was produced after his death in 2009.

2007 *Dividing the Estate* stage play

2010 *Main Street*, screenplay

EARLY 1980s

Texas economy continues to move away from agriculture and witnesses a boom in the electronics, computer, transport equipment, aerospace, and communications industries.

1982

Texas is affected by the worldwide recession. Lower energy demand, worldwide overproduction of oil, and the resulting fall in prices, causes a steep decline in the state's petroleum industry.

THE RISE AND FALL

in the oil industry's fortunes affects other industries as well. Thousands of banks pour money into real estate in the early eighties. By the late eighties, many of their investments become worthless, and numerous banks declare bankruptcy.



DIVIDING THE ESTATE



— and —

HORTON FOOTE

By the Numbers

Born in 1916, Horton Foote lived just short of **93** years

12 years old when he “got the call” to be an actor

17 years old when he began his acting career at Pasadena Playhouse, California

1939@ **23** years old wrote his first play, *Wharton Dance*

1952 Contracted for **9** teleplays at \$**1,000** each by Philco Television Playhouse

2008@ **92** years old wrote his last work, *Main Street*, screenplay

92 Written works, 95 including **3** memoirs

60 Stage plays

9 Screenplays

31 Teleplays

Wrote for **8** different Television Companies

6 Awards, **2** Oscars, **1** Emmy, **1** Pulitzer Prize, **1** National Medal of Arts from President Bill Clinton, William Inge Lifetime Achievement Award, plus the cast of **2010** *Orphan Home Cycle* won a Drama Desk Special Award

4 Kids: actors Horton, Jr. and Hallie, playwright Daisy, and director Walter

More than **1/2** or **45** of his works he attributes to beginning with tales told by his father

More than **1/2** set in fictional town of Harrison (based on Horton’s hometown Wharton)

In **1828** when Wharton first settled, the population was **3,000**

In **2003**, the population in Wharton reaches **10,000**

Over **700** friends filled the theater at his memorial service

Festival presenting **55** years worth of Horton Foote’s writing

11 Partner theaters participating in the Foote Festival, **15** organizations total

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