

VIOLA HOWREY
Courageous Businesswoman
By Lenore Harris Hughes
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Viola Rebecca Burkholder Howrey, who became an astute business owner after her husband's death in 1973, died March 25. She ran Howrey Lumber Co. until 1992, and also supervised a maquiladora in Juárez.

“She was a very independent person,” said her daughter, Mary Ann Skipworth.

Viola was born in Burlington, Iowa. Her father, a farmer, tired of the cold Iowa winters and moved his family to the Barstow-Pecos, Texas, area. They arrived on Christmas Day, 1912.

While attending grammar school, Viola paid her first visit to El Paso. “Mother liked to tell about this visit,” daughter Norma Hunt recalled. “She and her class members were



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taking a streetcar ride to Juárez to see the sights when Pancho Villa and a group of his men came toward the border on their horses, firing guns. The streetcar conductor stopped and ordered the group to lie down on the floor until they passed. It was very exciting to meet these banditos.

In 1929, she graduated from high school as valedictorian, then attended Byrnes Business School in Dallas.

She then went to work, returning to Barstow in 1932 to work in the county clerk's office. During a fierce dispute over the location of the county seat she and other officials were escorted by Texas Rangers to Monahans.

“One day, a young surveyor came to the courthouse. He had come to testify about some oil and mineral rights,” Norma said, “And when my mother came forward to swear him in, he said, ‘I swear that my name is Edwin Earl Howrey and I am single.’ Then he winked at her in full view of the courtroom. Everyone laughed.”

They were married Dec. 24, 1938, and came to El Paso for their honeymoon. When World War II began, Edward went to war, serving in Europe and Washington.

They moved to El Paso in 1948, where Edwin began working for the Mitchell Lumber Co., specializing in lumber from Mexico.

In 1951, Howrey bought the company, which was on land that became a part of the Chamizal settlement in 1966. “This put my father out of business,” said Mary Ann, “He had to purchase new property. At the same time the North-South Freeway took our house. It was a bad year for us.”

Viola started working with her husband in 1964. When Edwin died, she took over the

company. "That is when I first met Vi," said Dr. James H. Jauncey pastor of Coronado Christian Church. "She had an unbelievable grief, yet she was courageous, compassionate and a lovely character in every way."

She worked until 1992.

She was active in Beta Sigma Phi, since 1948, and worked with PTAs, Toastmasters club and the El Paso Stamp Club and taught classes in homemaking at the county extension offices.

She continued taking enrichment classes in adult education at UTEP and the YWCA.

She is survived by two daughters, Mary Ann and Norma; one brother, Bill; three sisters, Polly, Gertrude and Hazel; and four grandchildren.

"She was gracious, loving and never, ever complained," said Norma.

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