

B. Historical Figures

Albert Eugene Crouch (1876-1940)

Eugene Crouch was born in Washington County, Tennessee in 1876 to parents James D. Crouch and Julia Willard. He moved to McKinney as a young adult to work in the mercantile business owned by his uncle John P. Crouch.

The Crouch family was among the first to settle in McKinney. The first member to arrive was Isaac Crouch around 1863. He began a small business making coffins which in a few years grew into a sizable firm selling hardware and furniture and providing undertaking services. At that time, it was not uncommon for a furniture retailer to also have an undertaking side-business since hauling caskets and furniture required the same equipment.

Isaac died in 1879 at the age of 42. A year later his 38-year-old widow Mary Elizabeth Smith married John P. Crouch when he was 28. John was Isaac's first cousin once removed, meaning Isaac's father and John's grandfather were brothers. John's marriage to Mary gave him control if not ownership of Isaac's businesses.

The Crouch name became synonymous with undertaking in McKinney. Isaac's son and by marriage John's stepson (and second cousin) was Lewis W. Crouch who was the city's first licensed undertaker. Lewis's son, also named Isaac, received his license in 1904 at the age of 16 and worked in the trade for over 50 years.

John P. Crouch had two brothers, Hiter and Decatur, who moved to Texas from their homes in Tennessee. Decatur managed the Crouch hardware store in Farmersville while Hiter was a grain dealer in McKinney and later in Waco. The only brother to stay behind in Tennessee was James. However, James's son Eugene would later follow his uncles to McKinney.

Upon Eugene's arrival his uncle John put him to work in the furniture, hardware, and undertaking business. Eugene took up residence as a lodger at the Foote Hotel at the corner of Kentucky and Virginia Street. Though he worked for a while in his Uncle John's hardware store, he was also involved with various other enterprises until 1909 when he married Caroline "Carrie" Johnson, a native of Graham, Texas. That was also the same year his Uncle Hiter's Waco grain business was destroyed by fire. It is likely that this uncle was responsible for setting up Eugene in the grain business in McKinney.

Soon after Eugene's marriage to Carrie, they purchased a lot from Fannie Waddill and built a house on what is now 201 North Waddill Street. The couple had their first and only child Alyne Janelle in 1917. As a late teen, she attended the Hockaday School for girls in Dallas.

By 1915, Eugene was posting classified ads in the *McKinney Courier-Gazette* promoting the Crouch Grain Company. Eugene kept an office on the second floor of the Collin County National Bank Building, the bank of which his Uncle John was an officer and director. Eugene also maintained a warehouse near the H. & T.C. train depot. According to the *Courier-Gazette*, the Crouch Grain Company had the largest feed warehouse in the city.

Eugene's health began failing at a relatively early age. When he was 43 years old he suffered an illness that left him semi-conscious for several days. Specialists from Dallas were summoned. At the time, his wife was away visiting her Graham relatives. Meanwhile, Eugene stayed with his Uncle John. He eventually recovered but he would continue to have other episodes.

In 1920, Eugene entered the insurance field selling fire, tornado, and automobile insurance while continuing his grain business. However, another illness in 1923 forced him away from his business long enough that some customers wondered if he had permanently closed. Based on the lack of ad placement and other newspaper mentions of Eugene, his poor health kept his business and social activity to a minimum. The 1933, the city phone directory does not list his grain company nor his insurance business.

Another hardship Eugene had to deal with was his divorce from his wife Carrie in the early 1930s. Upon their divorce, she moved near Dallas for a while then back to her native home of Graham while Eugene continued to live at 201 North Waddill in McKinney. Before the couple divorced, however, they sold the house to their daughter Alyne for \$10 in a way that created a life estate in favor of Eugene. The intention of the sale was to provide Eugene a home until his death at which time Alyne would take possession.

In 1936, Eugene was again hospitalized, this time due to burns he sustained from a fall that caused him to come in contact with a hot stove. The *Courier-Gazette* reported that a nervous breakdown ensued.

Eugene died of a heart attack in January of 1940. The Crouch Funeral Home which his

Uncle John had owned when Eugene moved to McKinney handled the burial. Eugene Crouch was laid to rest in Block 99, Lot 1 of the Pecan Grove Cemetery.

Caroline “Carrie” Jane Johnson (1887-1967)

Carrie Johnson was born in Graham, Texas in 1887 to parents Clark Wesley Johnson, Jr. and Blanche Eichelberger. She was keenly interested in the history of North Texas and wrote about it professionally throughout her life. She is the author of “A History of Young County, Texas” published in 1937. Her work continues to provide source information for organizations like the Texas Historical Association and Wikipedia.

Carrie’s parents were among the pioneers who first settled Graham following the Civil War. Her father Clark was born in Indiana. He came to Texas as a lawyer and a Republican. He was active in politics for most of his career and was the Republican nominee for several offices, including Texas Attorney-General in 1886, Texas Governor in 1912 and U.S. Representative in 1920. None of which he won. In one of his early races in 1890, he won just over 2% of the vote against Democrat Samuel W. T. Lanham. Mr. Lanham never lost an election and won his bid for Texas Governor in 1904.

The Census of 1900 shows Carrie living with her parents in Graham. In 1909, at the age of 22 she married 33-year-old McKinney resident Eugene Crouch in a ceremony in her home town of Graham. Following their honeymoon in Chicago, the couple returned to McKinney where they became lodgers in the home of the widow Mary Emerson on South Kentucky Street. Mary’s husband, who died in 1901, was Thomas H. Emerson, one of the founders of the First National Bank of McKinney.

Carrie and Eugene were not renters for long. In 1910, Eugene purchased a lot from Fannie Waddill and built a house on what is now 201 North Waddill. Carrie quickly assimilated into McKinney society with the hosting of the Edelweiss Club in her home soon after it was built. The following year she became an elected officer. The club was established in 1898 with the goal of promoting the arts, culture, and civic participation. She continued to host club meetings in her home for the next 18 years.

In 1928, Carrie’s interest began to extend into other fields, including politics, history, and theater. She became the Publicity Chairman of the Hoover 300 Club and a precinct chairman for McKinney during the 1928 Presidential race that ended with the election of the 31st President, Herbert Hoover. She would later be an avid Republican supporter as the Party Chairman for Young County from 1943-1952.

In addition to her political activities of 1928, Carrie also became the president of the McKinney Little Theater. The Little Theater was actually a national movement during the 1920s that allowed small town theater groups to compete with each other. Dallas happened to have one of the best troupes in the country, winning the international competition held in New York for three consecutive years, 1924, 1925 and 1926. The success of the Dallas troupe inspired nearby towns start their own.

Without a doubt, Carrie's interest in history defined her career the most. While living in McKinney, Carrie made frequent visits to her family back in Graham. During her trips she would gather historical information about the area she grew up in and would some times spend months there compiling historical data about Young County dating back to its early frontier days when it was a mere army outpost. She published her findings in a book titled "A History of Young County" published in 1937. Throughout her lifetime, she contributed many articles about Texas history that were published by the Texas State Historical Association as well as magazines including *Frontier Times* and the *National Republic*. She published a second book in the 1960's about Fort Belknap, founded in 1851 by brevet Brigadier General William G. Belknap whose job it was to protect the Texas pioneers against raids by the Kiowa and Comanche Indians.

Carrie's work is still cited today in many contemporary writings. She was often lauded for her insights and writing skills. In 1929, after having one of her first articles published by *Sunday Dallas News* a local reporter wrote:

Mrs. Crouch is undoubtedly one of our city's most accomplished women and a writer of unusual forcefulness and literary ability whose stories are frequently sought after by the great Sunday newspapers of our country for their feature or syndicated pages.

Carrie was not only interest in history, her family was part of it. From her father being the first lawyer in Young County to her mother's great-great grandfather Adam Eichelberger fighting in the Revolutionary War, Carrie had a close connection with what she wrote about.

In 1967, Carrie Crouch died at her home in Graham at the age of 80. She is buried in the Oak Grove Cemetery in Graham, Texas.

Robert Braxton Ring (1911-1989)

Robert B. Ring was the pastor of the Southside Assembly of God Church on South Wilcox for 17 years from 1952 to 1968. His stepson was the founder of the still extant Hamm's Meat Market.

Robert B. Ring was born in Quitman, Georgia, the son of farmer William C. Ring and Mary G. Jenerette. As a young adult, he joined the Army and was stationed in Lawton, Oklahoma. In 1930, at the age of 19 he married Esther L. McDaniel. Six years later he began his ministry in Lawton with the establishment of a Mexican mission. He spent his early years in the ministry preaching in Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico and on the southern Texas boarder.

In 1952, Robert arrived in McKinney to become the pastor for the Southside Assembly of God Church at 1305 Wilcox Street succeeding Rev. H.E. Boatright. He served as pastor for 17 years. In the later half of his tenure he was also Presbyter of the Greenville and Denton sections making him the overseer of churches in those cities. As the church pastor, he is credited with growing the congregation, making building improvements, and even gifting to the church a Hammond organ. His wife Esther was an active part of the church being the superintendent of education.

In 1938, Robert and Esther had their only child, Molly Sue. She attended McKinney schools and married McKinney native Roy H. Carpenter just months before she graduated from Boyd High School in 1955. Her husband Roy was also in the ministry and was the Assembly of God pastor in Commerce, Texas until moving to Jacksboro. In May of 1968, Esther died of ovarian cancer and is buried in the Pecan Grove Cemetery. Robert retired as pastor in November of that year.

Following Robert's retirement he continued to preach and conduct services in various churches as the need arose but most of his income came from managing rent properties including the Shady Rest Mobile Home Park at 1310 South Tennessee Street. In 1970, the McKinney City Council passed a new ordinance that imposed inspection fees on mobile home parks. Robert appeared before the council to question the ordinance. This incident possibly contributed to Robert entering the race for City Council, Place 4 the following year. He teamed up with other candidates to create a unified ticket to challenge the incumbents lead by Mayor W.B. Finney. In the 1971 election, the challenger's efforts fell short. All of the incumbents won re-election. Robert, who ran against auto salesman Tom Allen, Jr., garnered only 414 votes compared to his opponent's 1,414 votes.

In 1972, Robert Ring remarried. He married the widow Velma (Ford) Hamm whose husband died four years earlier. Velma's son was Everett Hamm, the founder of Hamm's Meats which was originally located at 213 N. Tennessee. Robert and Velma lived at 807 Hall Street until Robert's death in 1989. Robert is buried in the Pecan Grove Cemetery next to his first wife Esther and nephew Maurice. Velma died in 2002 and is buried in the Ridgeview Memorial in Allen Park next to her first husband Charlie.