

## Judge H.L. Davis House

Written by Clyde Seeger and Helen Hall, 2002

Updated by Dave and Jill Hampton (current owners), 2014

### **The Community**

After Texas was admitted to the Union in 1845 and during the first convening of the newly created Texas Legislature in 1846, four adjacent counties were created, Collin County being one of those. In the act that created Collin County, five individuals were named as County Commissioners and were tasked with finding the geographical center of the county and to select two sites within three miles from this center. An election was then to be held to determine the location of the county seat.<sup>1</sup>

One of the newly appointed Commissioners was John McGarrah who owned a trading post in the small town of Buckner which was the only place for forty miles that had provisions. A meeting was held at McGarrah's trading post to decide the location of the county seat. No one really had any idea where the county lines were since it had not yet been surveyed, but the 75 people who attended the meeting determined that since Buckner was the only town of any size in the new county, it was more than likely within three miles of the county center.<sup>2</sup>

In August of that same year, John McGarrah donated 50 acres of his land for the newly created county seat and the town was laid out in 80' square lots with a public square in the middle for a courthouse. Shortly thereafter a log courthouse was constructed, Judge Mills of Bonham began holding court, and the U.S. Postmaster established a post office with guess who being named Postmaster—none other than John

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<sup>1</sup> J.Lee Stambaugh and Lillian J. Stambaugh, *A History of Collin County, Texas* (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1958) pp. 40-42.

<sup>2</sup> Capt Roy F. Hall and Helen Gibbard Hall, *Collin County: Pioneering in North Texas* (Quanah, Texas: Nortex Press, 1975) p. 33.

McGarrah.<sup>3</sup> However, against the instructions of the Legislature, the Commissioners had not conducted a vote between two sites when they selected Buckner. When the Texas Legislature learned of this the following year they passed a new act “establishing more permanently the seat of Justice in Collin County.” This time the county was surveyed and its center was determined. Unfortunately for Buckner, it was found to be just outside the three-mile center. Two new sites were chosen, McKinney and Sloan’s Grove and an election was held at Jack’s trading post. On Election Day a twist of fate decided the election. High water had flooded both the East Fork of the Trinity River and Wilson Creek making it impossible for voters favoring a Sloan’s Grove site from the South and East to make it to Buckner to cast their votes. As a result, McKinney became the new county seat by a margin of ten to one.<sup>4</sup>

John L. Lovejoy soon thereafter hired two teamsters, Manse Wilmeth and James L. Reed, and 16 oxen to pull his little store from Buckner to the northwest corner of the newly laid out square, thus becoming the first permanent structure in McKinney. This event made May 3, 1848 McKinney’s official birthday.<sup>5</sup>

Until the opening of the Houston & Texas Central Railroad (H&TC) in 1872, McKinney remained a small farming town. With the construction of the railroad came five hundred Irish workers and with them came housing, saloons, and gambling halls. Almost overnight McKinney grew from a stagnant backwater town to a growing community. With the railroad, the world was now open to McKinney and with it the opportunity to trade and export its rich products of the land, principally cotton and wheat. With this flurry of economic activity came the inevitable support services, businesses, jobs and the snowball effect of a booming economy. The city’s fortune geometrically multiplied. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, McKinney had become one of the 4 wealthiest small cities in the state and boasted three weekly papers, two banks,

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<sup>3</sup> Minnie Pitts Champ, et al, *Collin County History*, ([www.geocities.com/Heartland/Prairie/1746/collin.html](http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Prairie/1746/collin.html))

<sup>4</sup> Hall and Hall, P33.

<sup>5</sup> Stambaugh and Stambaugh; Hall.

gristmills, flour mills, an opera house, six churches, an ice plant, a municipally owned water system, and an impressive population of 8,500 souls.<sup>6</sup>

## The House

While commerce flourished in McKinney, fortunes were made and the newly created rich families built grand homes, many of which were built on College, Tucker, Church, Bengé, Virginia, and Louisiana streets—the Judge H.L. Davis house at 705 N. College Street being one of those. A number of these homes are part of the Tucker Addition, a section of McKinney that was in high demand by the city's newly prosperous businessmen and professionals due to its proximity to the Town Square and economic center.

Before it became known as the Tucker Addition, it was a large tract of land owned by Jack Tucker, a great horseman and a gregarious individual. Historians say that wherever Jack lived became the center of all community activity. This was certainly true in 1859 when Jack staged the most famous horse race Texas had ever known. The race took place a mere block from the Davis House on what is now known as, appropriately enough, Tucker Street. The race pitted the legendary quarter horse racer Steel Dust from Lancaster against the more widely known and hometown favorite Monmouth.<sup>7</sup> Large wagers were placed and James L. Throckmorton, later Governor of Texas, got the race underway with a shot from his pistol.<sup>8</sup> Steel Dust won the race by a length. No celebrations occurred at any of the 23 saloons downtown since the local men had just lost all their money, horses, and saddles on what they believed to be a sure bet. As a

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<sup>6</sup> Anonymous, *History of McKinney* ([www.mckinneycvb.org/mckinney.html](http://www.mckinneycvb.org/mckinney.html)) and 1902 Sanborn Map.

<sup>7</sup> Judge George Pearis Brown, *The Brown Papers: Interviews with McKinney's Old Settlers* (Collin County Central Museum) and Newspaper Article, *Jack Tuckers Biography*, (McKinney, Texas: McKinney Democrat), September 22, 1921

<sup>8</sup> Hall and Hall, PP 277-278 and Newspaper Article, *J.W. Throckmorton*, (McKinney, Texas: McKinney Democrat), April 25, 1894

result of this and other highly publicized wins, Steel Dust went on to become the most influential sire on the Texas strain of the American quarter horse as there was high demand for his progeny.<sup>9</sup>

When Jack Tucker died, his wife Nancy Ann Tucker opened up their large tract of land for new homes and H.L. Davis was one of her customers. H.L. and his wife Emma had just moved to McKinney from Van Alstyne when they purchased the north half of what was then legally described as Block 3 of the Tucker Addition, an over sized half-acre corner lot, for \$300 on August 23, 1887.<sup>10</sup>

The construction of the home was accomplished in phases over an estimated span of eight years. With a street address of 213 College Street, the house first appears as a single story residence in the 1897 and 1902 Sanborn maps of McKinney. By 1908, the home is shown in the Sanborn maps as a two-story residence.<sup>11</sup> It is readily seen in these drawings that the basic shape of the house was retained from the single story residence to the second story residence, but the Southeastern portion of the home was enlarged and the east facing front porch was wrapped around to the south side of the structure. Splitting the difference between 1902 (when it was still a single story dwelling) and 1908 (when it was depicted as a two-story dwelling), preservation consultants Hardy-Heck-Moore placed the date of final construction as 1905.<sup>12</sup> According to previous owners, the Parnell's, the home was constructed at a cost of \$5,000, although property tax records list the value of the home at \$2,000 in 1910.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, The Handbook of Texas Online, ([www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/QQ/tcq1.html](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/QQ/tcq1.html))

<sup>10</sup> Collin county Land Deed Records, Vol. 63, pp. 126-127

<sup>11</sup> Sanborn Maps of McKinney, TX (New York: Sanborn Map Company), 1897, 1902, 1908

<sup>12</sup> Hardy-Heck-Moore, *Historic Research Notes from the McKinney Historic Survey*, (On file with Collin County Historic Preservation Officer), 1985

<sup>13</sup> Hardy-Heck-Moore

The Davis House does not neatly fit into a particular architectural style. It was built during a period when styles were changing and were somewhat in flux. The High Victorian look was waning while the cleaner, simpler designs of the Craftsman Bungalow and the Prairie Style were just beginning to emerge.

The home is essentially a blend of an early example of the Prairie Style, the American Foursquare (also known as the "Prairie Box"), and a bit of Victorian quirkiness thrown in for good measure, e.g., the Corinthian porch columns.

The home was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as were 44 other homes in a multiple-resource nomination as part of McKinney's Historic Resources Survey in 1985, and was placed on McKinney's "high" preservation priority list. The National Register describes the home as "...a two story dwelling with an asymmetrical plan. It has weatherboard siding, hip roof construction with composite shingles and box eaves; stick brackets; wood-sash double hung windows with 1/1 lights; single-door entrance with sidelights; five-bay porch with hip roof on South and East elevations; fluted composite columns; battered balustrade; two interior brick chimneys, Sullivanesque frieze (made of horsehair and plaster) and wide overhanging eaves; and window and door surrounds with classical detailing...The house is a noteworthy example of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century dwelling and is distinguished by the Sullivanesque frieze"<sup>14</sup>

According to the 1985 Hardy-Heck-Moore survey, the Davis House and two similar houses (401 N. Lamar and 513 N. Church) are believed to have been designed by the noted Dallas architect J.E. Flanders who is better known for his design of the Craig-Heard House in McKinney, numerous Texas county courthouses and churches, as well as exhibition buildings at the Texas State Fair Grounds.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of whom the actual architect was, the design was clearly influenced by the work of the renowned architect Louis

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<sup>14</sup> National Register of Historic Places, *Inventory Form*

<sup>15</sup> J.R. Willis Jr., *Dallas' First Architect: James Edward Flanders* ([http://members.aol.com/\\_ht\\_a\\_jrwillisjr/page6.html](http://members.aol.com/_ht_a_jrwillisjr/page6.html))

Sullivan (1856-1924) who coined the architectural dictum “form ever follows function”. Particularly noteworthy is the use of the “Sullivanese frieze”---these are the stylized decorative plaster panels underneath the eaves, which resemble Irish interlace of the early Middle Age—an ornamentation Sullivan often used.<sup>16</sup> Sullivan’s designs were a major influence to the Prairie Style, an architectural style that would ultimately become popularized by and inextricably linked with his most famous student, Frank Lloyd Wright.

The home was built using horizontal shiplap on the interior and diagonal shiplap on the exterior---one of a handful of homes in the McKinney Historic District to be constructed in this manner.<sup>17</sup> Surprisingly, the home’s exterior has changed very little since it was built. The home still retains the original wraparound front porch, entry parlor, living parlor, dining room, library, butler’s pantry, kitchen, and three bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. It is estimated that the Davis family added a garage in the 1930’s converted a back porch into two bathrooms in the 1940’s and created a storage room between the garage and kitchen by enclosing the garage breezeway in the 1950’s. This storage room was later renovated in 1998 and transformed into a family room.

Inside, the layout of the home is typical of Victorian-era architecture with rooms being distinct spaces unto themselves and a kitchen attached to the back of the house almost as if it were an afterthought. Although the home underwent an extensive restoration from 1997-2000, much of the home’s interior has remained the same with the original wood floors, first floor windows, wood trim and doors, and fireplace mantels. The building materials used in the interior are also typical of the era and include heart pine for the floors, Douglas fir and pine for the doors and trim, shiplap walls, and quarter sawn oak for the fireplace mantels.

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<sup>16</sup> The Preservation Coalition of Erie County, Sullivanese Style ([bfn.org/preservationworks/bam/archsty/sull/sull.html](http://bfn.org/preservationworks/bam/archsty/sull/sull.html))

<sup>17</sup> According to Steve Ostrander, Historic Home Restoration Contractor.

## The Family

No other Collin County family had been in public service on the Collin County Commissioner's Court as long as the Davis family and possibly no family has since.<sup>18</sup> With two Collin County Judges, a District Attorney, and a County Commissioner, the family served a cumulative total of 40 years in public service spanning three generations. While this is impressive enough, it excludes over 30 years teaching in McKinney's public schools and more than 25 years serving as McKinney's Postmaster. Indeed, the Davis family contributed greatly to their community.

Born in nearby Howe, Texas on October 8, 1861, Harvey Louis "H.L.," Davis completed his undergraduate studies at Savoy College and attending law school at the University of Texas. After earning his law degree, H.L. married Emma Umphrees at her home in Van Alstyne, Texas on September 12, 1886 and shortly thereafter moved his new bride to McKinney where he opened a law office in 1887 for what was to be a productive 60 plus years of law practice.<sup>19</sup>

Prior to becoming County Judge, H.L. Davis served as District Attorney for an estimated 10 years.<sup>20</sup> Well regarded in the community, H.L. Davis was urged to run for State Legislature in 1903 as "he would be a hard man to beat."<sup>21</sup> In 1910 he was elected to the office of County Judge and went on to serve for six years, earning the distinction of being the first County Judge to serve three consecutive two-year terms.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Hall and Hall, p. 171.

<sup>19</sup> Hall and Hall, P. 171

<sup>20</sup> *The Doings of People in and Around the City*, (McKinney, Texas: The Daily Gazette), may 20, 1899 and *Loyal Democrats of McKinney*, (McKinney, Texas: the McKinney Examiner), August 27, 1908

<sup>21</sup> Newspaper Column, *The Local Prognosticator*, (McKinney, Texas: The McKinney Daily Gazette), December 25, 1903

<sup>22</sup> Stambaugh and Stambaugh, P. 246 and Obituary of H.L. Davis, *Judge H.L. Davis: Pioneer Resident Passes Away*, (McKinney, Texas: The Examiner), July 12, 1956.

During his tenure the County issued its first bond issue and with the proceeds the first all-weather roads were constructed.<sup>23</sup>

Judge Davis enjoyed a fair amount of commercial success as evidenced by his significant land ownership and multiple farms the family rented. At the time of his death he owned a total of 715 acres in 12 separate properties.<sup>24</sup> He may have been a land speculator as the Collin County Land Records are peppered with numerous buy and sell transactions by H.L. Davis.

The Judge was an active participant in community affairs. He was a lifelong Mason and a devout Christian who taught bible classes for 35 years at the First Christian Church of McKinney. At age 92, he held the distinction of being the oldest male member of that church and was elder emeritus. Judge Davis was remembered at his death on July 4, 1956 as man who "...always stood for the true and upright. He was always found in the fight on the side of law and order. His sterling Christian character and keen sense of honor and integrity leaves a wonderful heritage to his family and community."<sup>25</sup>

Emma Davis was also an active participant in local social affairs and was a charter member of the Owl Club, a unique women's literary study club. The club was quite forward thinking in its day and sought to promote learned thinking in the community. The club's members were independent-minded women as evidenced by the tradition of using their maiden names for the club's roll call instead of their husband's initials. Emma was a member of the Owl Club from 1903 until her death on April 25, 1949. She also served as the club's president during 1909-1910 and again in 1934-1935.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hall and Hall, P. 171

<sup>24</sup> Probate Records of the Estate of H.L. Davis, County Clerk's Office, Collin County Courthouse, Annex A, McKinney, Texas

<sup>25</sup> Obituary of H.L. Davis, *Judge H.L. Davis: Pioneer Resident Passes Away*, (McKinney, Texas: The Examiner), July 12, 1956.

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, *History of the Owl Club*, (McKinney, Texas, 1963) – reference section of the McKinney Memorial Public Library.

Emma and H.L. had two boys, Don O. and J. Lyman, and one girl, Carrie Jean. J. Lyman started his career managing the numerous Davis family farms but later struck out on his own, first moving to Sherman, Texas in 1928 to try his luck in the lumber business and ultimately on to Arizona where he died September 9, 1953.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, after J. Lyman's death, his wife, Jeanne Finch Davis, returned to live in McKinney and like Emma Davis, Jeanne was also an Owl Club member and served as the club's president from 1957-58.<sup>28</sup>

Don O. Davis graduated from Texas A&M College in 1911 and went on to serve as Collin County commissioner in Precinct 1 for 12 years (1928-1940),<sup>29</sup> followed by a lengthy career as McKinney's Postmaster for 25 plus years. His time spent on both of those roles was longer than any person previous. As was common among members of the Davis family, Don O. was socially active in the community—he was a lifelong Mason, President of the Rotary Club, and a member of the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>30</sup>

Carrie Jean, the Davis's only daughter, inherited the home from her father upon his death. His 1956 probate record lists the value of the home at \$5,000.<sup>31</sup> Carrie Jean remained a single woman and lived almost her entire life at this residence (over 70 years). She spent her working career as a McKinney schoolteacher, teaching sixth grade students for over thirty years.<sup>32</sup> According to those who knew her, Carrie Jean was a very creative, artsy sort who gave dance and music lessons to countless McKinney children in the front parlor of the home.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Obituary of J. Lyman Davis (McKinney, Texas: Weekly Democrat Gazette) October 1, 1953.

<sup>28</sup> Anonymous, *History of the Owl Club*, (McKinney, Texas, 1963) – reference section of the McKinney Memorial Public Library.

<sup>29</sup> Stambaugh and Stambaugh, p. 251

<sup>30</sup> Obituary of Don O. Davis, (McKinney, Texas: Courier Gazette), December 17, 1962

<sup>31</sup> Probate Records of the Estate of H.L. Davis, County Clerk's Office, Collin County Courthouse, Annex A, McKinney, Texas

<sup>32</sup> Obituary of Carrie Jean Davis, (McKinney, Texas: Courier Gazette), October 23, 1975.

<sup>33</sup> Remembrance by Rita Clark, longtime neighbor and friend of Carrie Jean, confirmed by Helen Hall, local historian who also know Carrie Jean

While the home is named “Judge H.L. Davis House”, it might more aptly be titled “Judges Davis House” as grandson Don Weaver Davis, who served as Collin County Judge in Precinct 1 for 12 years (1960-1972),<sup>34</sup> also owned and lived in the Davis House from 1970 to 1975. Don Weaver (son of Don O. and Gladys Davis) and his wife Patricia purchased the home from Carrie Jean for \$22,500 on July 7, 1970.<sup>35</sup> Don Weaver died on October 22, 1975 but his wife Patricia continued to own the home until 1978 when it was subsequently sold out of the Davis family.<sup>36</sup> Thus, beginning from 1887 which is the earliest documented date of a dwelling on this property, the Davis family had owned and lived in this house for an impressive 91 years spanning three generations.

### **The Restoration**

Sadly, the home went through a period of neglect over a number of years and experienced severe deterioration. Neighborhood residents state that the porch roof had numerous holes with parts of the porch ceiling visibly hanging. Sections of siding had fallen off and much of the lower siding that had not yet fallen off was rotting. The second story window frames had decayed to the point where holes were visible. In the interior there was a visible sag in the living parlor ceiling, so much so that the occupants had discontinued using the upstairs bathroom for fear that the claw foot tub would come through the floor and crash into the room below. This once grand residence had unfortunately become the eyesore of the neighborhood and was considered by most to be beyond saving.

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<sup>34</sup> Obituary of Don Weaver Davis, (McKinney, Texas: Courier Gazette), October 23, 1975.

<sup>35</sup> Collin County Land Deed Records, Vol. 760, PP. 633-634

<sup>36</sup> Purchased by Lawrence and Marsha Coffman on January 6, 1978 (Collin County Land Deed Records, Vol. 189, p.3) and later conveyed to Joseph and Janice Maples on June 23, 1995 (Collin County Land Deed Records, Vol. 1995, P. 043880)

Fortunately for the residence and the neighborhood, a young couple (the Parnells) willing to take on the challenge of restoring this fine old home purchased and rescued the home on May 16, 1997.<sup>37</sup> For three hard, long years the couple labored alongside contractors to restore the beauty and dignity of this grand home. Steve Ostrander, a historic home restoration contractor of Ostrander Construction, performed the majority of the contract work. Every surface, every system, every fixture, every feature, every seam experienced a repair, enhancement, or replacement with care taken to blend with the original home as much as possible. The result was nothing short of miraculous. The house emerged as elegant as before, morphing from the ugly duckling of the neighborhood to arguably one of the finest in the historic district. The City of McKinney was impressed enough with the restoration that it awarded the home the Renovation Excellence Award in 2000—a prestigious award presented to only one renovated home each year.

Unexpectedly, employment forced an out-of-state relocation for the Parnell's. Reluctantly, they sold their home to the Seeger's on May 25, 2000,<sup>38</sup> almost exactly three years from the date they themselves had purchased it. The Seeger's major contribution has been the landscaping.

Co-located among other fine, restored historic homes, Judge H. L. Davis house has since been the subject of advertisements and was one of many homes on the Heritage Guild's 2001 Christmas Tour of Homes.

This paper was researched and written by Clyde Seeger and Helen Hunt in 2002 and submitted to the Texas Historical Commission and achieved the honor of a medallion to commemorate the home as a recorded Texas Historical Landmark. The Seeger's ultimately sold the home in 2005 to the Hampton's, David and Jill, who have resided in the home for the past nine years with their two daughters. Their major contributions to the home have been a pool, various landscaping improvements to the entire property and a slight

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<sup>37</sup> Collin County Land Deed Records, Vol. 1997, P. 4694-371

<sup>38</sup> Collin County Land Deed Records, Vol. 2000, p. 4694-374

remodel of the kitchen in 2011 as well as numerous decorating changes to the interior. The basic footprint of the house still remains as it always has been. There have not been any major structural changes made to the house by the Hampton's apart from basic maintenance and upkeep of the grand old girl. The house was on the 36<sup>th</sup> annual Holiday Tour of Homes in 2009 and also was on the McKinney Garden Clubs bi-annual tour of homes and gardens in 2008.