

## E. Narrative History

In 1841, the Republic of Texas granted William Davis 3,129 acres of land in return for his participation in the new nation's battle for independence. This five square-mile tract of land was situated on East Fork of the Trinity river in what was then Fannin County. After the Republic of Texas became the 28th state to enter the United States of America in 1845, it subdivided several counties into smaller units. Collin County was carved out of Fannin County.

A small town called Buckner was the seat of the new county until the 1848 State Legislature required that the County Seat be within three miles of the geographical center of the county. As it turned out, William Davis' tract sat within this radius. When the new seat was chosen by an open election (where only 11 people voted), the new seat of Collin County was established in the southwest corner of the Davis tract.

In 1849, William Davis, along with his wife Margaret, "donated" 120 acres of his original tract to the County Commissioners. This donation became the new town of McKinney. At the time, William Davis considered this acreage to be some of his least valuable land because of the heavy brush that covered it. Still, as consideration for giving up his land, he was deeded three lots within the new town site which he sold as fast as he could. This 120 acres became known as the McKinney Original Donation and was divided into 87 blocks which were to be sold to finance the City of McKinney. The remaining Davis' land surrounded most of the town of McKinney. Despite Davis' prospects as one of Collin County's largest land owners, shortly after donating the land to be a new city, William abandoned his wife and child and headed to California in search of gold.

In 1854, Margaret petitioned the County Court for an order of sale of a sufficient portion of the Davis tract for the support and maintenance of herself and young son. The order was granted and a four-acre tract located about a half mile northeast of McKinney was set aside and sold at auction by Sheriff J.H. Lovejoy. The highest bidder at auction with a bid of \$100 was Joseph B. Wilmeth. The property changed hands several times and was subdivided during the following decades.

In 1895, banker Henry H. White purchased the lot now known as 510 Tucker Street from J.A. Evans for \$1,200. Soon after his purchase, the new owner built a simple, seven-room, Queen Anne style house. A portion of this original house can be seen in a postcard published before 1915 by jewelry store owner S.H. Abbott. The postcard titled "Homes on Tucker Street" features the home belonging to drug-store owner R.E. Bristol

in the foreground with H.H. White's house next door.

H.H. White occupied the house for several years along with his wife and mother-in-law. In 1911, Mr. White left McKinney and the banking trade to help establish a new wholesale dry goods company in Dallas. Mr. White did not find an immediately buyer for his property so he rented the house to E.M. Perkins, the newly hired cashier for the Continental Bank. The business Mr. White was involved with in Dallas was sold in 1914. Around this same time, he sold his McKinney home and moved to California.

H.H. White sold his McKinney home to dry goods store owner James Merritt for \$3,250. The following year, James and wife Rosabel contracted with Dan Jones for an extensive remodel of the house. Mr. Jones added rooms to the upstairs but more significantly he redesigned the house to follow the Arts & Craft Style. Among the changes Mr. Jones made included installing square columns to support the porch roof. He also extended the eaves of the house and added exposed rafters and knee bracing. The result was a house that the *McKinney Courier-Gazette* declared as "one of the nicest and most modern in the entire city." This kind of complement was often bestowed on new houses in McKinney but as a photo taken after the home's construction shows, this home indeed deserved the praise.

In 1916, the City of McKinney passed a resolution regarding changes to Sherman Street which bordered the western side of James' property. The changes created a small strip of land that was originally the eastern part of Sherman Street. The City allowed James purchased this land for one dollar. James later purchased the vacant lot adjacent to the north line of his property, land that was previously owned by cotton dealer J.D. Bass.

In 1923, Mr. Merritt once again transformed the house with an extensive remodeling effort. This time he hired the Osborne Brothers to sheathed the entire house in a brick pattern consisting of seven different earth tones. The porch roof was removed and the front entrance received a new portico. James and Rosabel continued to occupy the house during the course of extensive remodeling. The new house that emerged from the changes exhibited a strong Prairie Style character with a slight Asian flare demonstrated by the swoop of the bell-cast eaves attached to the portico and sleeping porch.

James and Rosabel lived in the house until their deaths. James died in 1949 and Rosabel two years later. The Merritt's had a sole heir, their son James Merritt, Jr. who sold the house to lawyer W.C. "Clarence" Dowdy and wife Emily in 1953. The

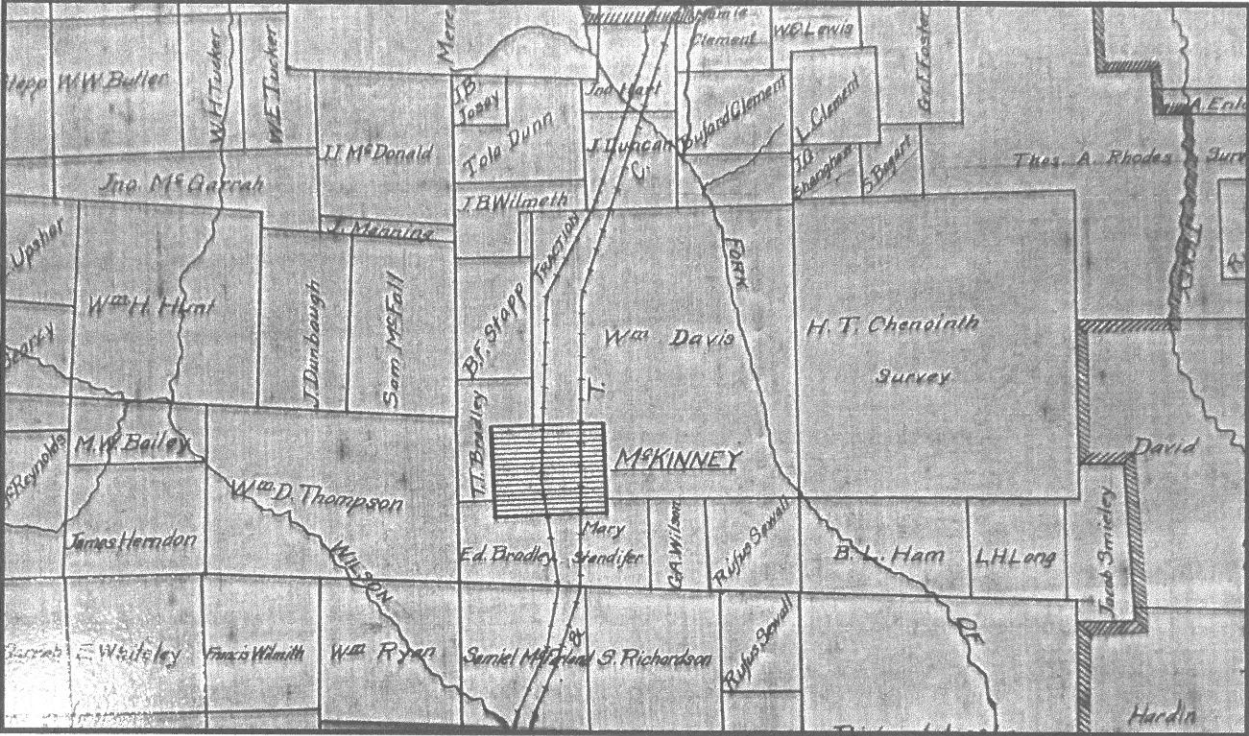
Dowdys lived in the house until their deaths. Emily died in 1981. Clarence died in 1985. Clarence and Emily had three children. Though the youngest child James probably spent some time in the house while he was in college, it was their eldest son W.C. "Bill" Dowdy, Jr. who acquired the house upon Clarence's death.

From a 1985 photo, it appears the house was in need of structural and cosmetic repairs. It is most likely Bill and his wife Ann who are responsible for enclosing the sleeping porch and adding on a laundry room at the rear of the house. Some time before 1985, Bill and Ann painted the house the beige-yellow color it now has. They did, however, restore other aspects of the house to its 1920s style, including reconstructing the bell-cast curve to the portico and porch and re-installing what appears to be a dormer window belonging to the 1915 version of the house.

Bill died in 2012 and Ann died in 2015. At the time of Ann's death the interior of the house was little changed from its 1923 update with 60-year-old light fixtures, stained wood trim, and fabric wall-covering still intact.

# F. Drawings

## William Davis Headright



When Texas became a republic, it granted land to participants in the battle for independence. There were several classes of grants available depending on when a person arrived in Texas and if they were married. Generally, a married man who was in Texas before March 2, 1836 would be eligible for a First Class Headright grant of one league and one labor of land (4,605 acres). A single man could get 1/3 of a league and one labor.

William Davis was granted 2/3 of a league and a labor of land in 1841. This type of grant did not fit any of the regular headright classes at the time and suggests that William Davis (who was single at the time) was granted an augmentation based on some unique performance associate with his contribution to Texas independence.

This grant became known as the Davis Survey and amounted to 3,129 acres which encompassed the site chosen to be the County Seat of Collin County. William Davis donated 120 acres of his land to the County Commissioners to be used to create the town of McKinney. The legal description of properties which were a part of this donation include the words "McKinney Original Donation."