

Introduction: McKinney

The history of McKinney, one of the oldest towns in North Texas, dates back over one hundred and sixty years to 1841, when the first settlers arrived in the region from Kentucky, Arkansas, and Tennessee. Collin County got its name five years later, when the state's first legislators, meeting under the Constitution of the State in 1846, created Collin, Denton, Hunt, and Grayson counties out of the territory that had been named Fannin County, an area that encompassed most of Northeast Texas.

The original county seat was established in Buckner in 1846, but just two years later, the seat was moved three miles eastward to a more central location, and was renamed McKinney. Both the county and its seat were named after Collin McKinney. The town was originally incorporated in 1849, and was re-incorporated on May 28, 1859.

Historically Significant Buildings

There are a number of historically significant buildings in McKinney, contributing to a certain 19th century charm that has earned the town a listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Among the oldest and most interesting are:

- The Old Collin County Courthouse: built in 1876, the first permanent building on the downtown square.
- The Old Collin County Jail: built in 1880, a site that has become popular with Hollywood filmmakers in recent years as a movie location.
- The First Methodist Church: built in 1900, which stands as the oldest existing church in town.
- The original home of Captain "Tuck" Hill, friend of Jesse and Frank James: built in 1877 and located at 616 W. Virginia.
- Another place made famous by Hollywood, the house used as the haunted house in the movie *Benji* built in 1870 and located at 1104 S. Tennessee.

Residential Neighborhood

The heart of McKinney, and one of it's most exalted and inspiring features is it's large and vibrant historic residential neighborhood. Consisting of over 1,700 homes and buildings, the neighborhood is dotted with Victorian, Revival, Tudor, Neo-Classical, Georgian and the like homes, to form a wonderful small town mosaic – both eclectic and traditional, the neighborhood is a reflection of the character of the people who live there and forms the backdrop to the J.C.N. House.

Dr. John C. N. Smith

Born in Smith Station, Alabama in 1850, Dr. Smith joined the Confederate Army at the very young age of 15, just as the war was winding down. Shortly after being discharged, he attended Oxford University in Mississippi and then dentistry school in Baltimore, MD., where learned the profession he would practice for the rest of his life.

Around 1875 Dr. Smith Married Ms. Ada Fagan of Opalika, Alabama and in 1894 their only child was born, Miss. Estelle Smith. It was at this same time the family moved to Paris, TX , then to Plano before eventually settling in McKinney around 1900.

The Smith's first residence in McKinney was at 21 W. Tucker St. as noted in the 1902 phonebook. By 1909 they had moved to 405 Tucker, which is at the corner of Tucker and Benge St. And by 1917, after purchasing the property at 306 W. Davis (which is at the corner of Benge and Davis) the Smith's razed the existing building and constructed the residence that stands there today.

Dr. Smith first set up his dentistry practice at 1-2 E Virginia St, which is most likely where the old Ritz Movie theatre used to be. Sometime prior to 1909 Dr. Smith moved his practice to 1-2 N. Kentucky before eventually moving to the Foote Building sometime before 1917. It was here that his Dentist office stayed until his retirement and death some 10 years later.

Dr. Smith was a member of the Royal Arch Mason's and the St. John's Lodge, and was closely associated with many prominent members of the community. As a testament to this, at his funeral he had among his pallbearers the editor of the McKinney Examiner, F.C. Thompson, Will Rhea of Rhea's Mill township, Hamp Wysong (Wysong st.) and Forest Board (Board st.) all long standing citizens and prominent families of McKinney in the early days.

306 W Davis

The house itself is a modest two story residence. Built at the top of a hill, it would've been notable at the time for its south facing second story balcony, which has since been enclosed. The Balcony affords the homeowner a towering view of the southeast part of McKinney. The Davis and Benge intersection where the house resides is but 1 short block over from Virginia and 2 blocks up from the courthouse. Living here, even by 1917 standards, would've meant you were a person of some standing.

The interior of the house is characteristic of the period, with large, still functioning pocket door separating the dining room from the front parlor. The downstairs sitting room has the original fireplace and Mantel, and as best we can tell, the original hand painted decoration surrounding it. All the doors downstairs, and most up, retain the original hardware. Many of the doors throughout the house have ornate 5 panel in-lay carvings, features many antique collectors would love to get their hands on.

All the original flooring remains, including several varieties of red oak and cedar. The claw foot tub upstairs is period, but it's unknown whether its original to the house or not. There is a small detached wooden shed in the back, which we know from the Sanborn maps was added sometime after 1952.

Estelle Smith

Estelle Smith lived with her mother at 306 W. Davis from the time of her father's death in January 1927 until her mother's death in 1945. From then on, Estelle lived at 306 W. Davis alone until she moved to a retirement home on Route 5 in 1966. 3 years later, in

August 1969, Estelle Smith died, having never married or producing any children. A neighbor has informed us that Estelle was a wonderfully caring woman who volunteered with the church and cared for a beautiful garden around her house for many years. She is said to have only used well water, drawn from somewhere on her property, to water the plants.

Estelle was never married it seems because her fiancé, whom she met at McKinney Boyd High School, never made it back from World War II. As was common in those days, young woman chose not to marry another out of love and respect for their dead fiancée's memory.

The Legacy of Dr. J.C.N. Smith

It may seem at first glance that nothing important can be said of the small, blue two story home in the quite little neighborhood just off the square. But it's upon closer examination that we come to know and appreciate it's real worth. Here a confederate soldier came to build a practice and raise a family. Here a prominent dentist, beloved father and husband built a place, both in the hearts of people who knew him, and in the community in which he lived . Here his survivors, both widow and daughter, spent 40 years of their life, after he lost his, in the house. Neighbors remember the kindly woman with the homemade pies and beautiful garden. The town, upon losing one of it's fondest citizens, honored Dr. Smith with a front page memorial in the town newspaper. The Royal Arch Mason's, as is their storied tradition, bestowed a traditional graveside ceremony. And finally he was remembered by the few remaining confederate soldiers still alive. The home itself represents a forgotten way of life, but the life itself is worth remembering.

Josh and Jennifer Richmond
Owner, 306 W. Davis St
June 10, 2009