

## E. Narrative History

Edward Bradley came from Kentucky to Texas with his wife Nancy and four children in 1842 to partake of the land being offering by the settlement company known as the Peter's Colony. The Republic of Texas used organizations like this to attract immigrants to the young nation by offering lucrative land contracts. Ed Bradley's family was among the first 200 families to settle in the area. Despite having plenty of land to give away, the Peter's Colony managers had difficulty settling as many people as required by their agreement with the Republic. Management issues within the Peter's Colony organization led to great legal confusion regarding the titles held by the settlers. It was only after Texas joined the United States that most of these disputes became settled. In the end, Ed Bradley's headright grant of 640 was affirmed. In 1855, his son Thomas (1824-1881) was deeded a separate grant signed by Texas Governor Elisha M. Pease for 291 acres situated a half mile west of the McKinney town square.

Thomas Bradley's tract was popularly known as College Hill. Though Thomas was a farmer by profession, he made a good living selling off the land he owned. He donated to the City of McKinney two acres which is now the site of Caldwell Elementary. Some of the land he sold to real estate developers but he also sold much of it to individuals. In 1874, Thomas' daughter Margaret married Hugo Smith. That same year, for consideration of "love and affection," Thomas deeded a two-acre parcel to the newly weds. Three years later, the couple sold a half-acre portion of that parcel to A.B. Price, creating the lot with its current dimensions that is now at 700 West Virginia Street.

The lot change hands several times, most likely without any improvements, until V.T. Chew purchased the property for \$650 in 1880. Within a year, he sold the property for \$1,150 suggesting that a structure may have been added to the property. However, it is not until 1902 that this property, so far from the town center, is included on a map. This early map shows a small house facing Bradley Street. Between 1881 and 1905 the property changed hands five times.

At the beginning of 1906, the Willis Dowell family lived on their farm west of town but in June of that year the family home burned. This must have been the impetus behind the family's move to town later that year. In December of 1906, Willis purchased the home on Bradley Street from W.G. Rogers for \$1,150.

The 1910 Census shows Willis and his wife Susan living on Bradley Street with six of

their eleven children, including their youngest son (age 12) named Jabonowski. Around 1913, the *McKinney Courier-Gazette* writes "W.R. Dowell has had many nice improvements made on his nice home at the corner of Bradley and West Louisiana." Despite the error about the home's location, this indicates the time that Willis hired carpenter W.J. Higgins to enlarge the existing structure, giving it the form as exists today.

In 1914, when Willis was 66 years old he conveyed the deed for the Bradley property to his son James P. Dowell. The consideration for the transaction included "love and affection" but also included James paying off two past-due \$380 notes Willis still owed from his 1906 purchase of the property. Further consideration included money James had already paid to W.J. Higgins along with other amounts that were due him for construction work on the house. The deed also stipulated:

*that the said W.R. Dowell and wife Susan Dowell shall have the use of said premises so long as they or either of them shall live and desire the same, that is to say that they shall manage, handle, control and use said premises as their own so long as they or either of them shall live. It is also expressly understood that in so far as this conveyance is based upon love and affection: that the same is intended as a gift from W.R. Dowell and wife Susan Dowell to J.P. Dowell, Jr. and is not to be considered as an advancement for any sum whatsoever.*

The language regarding the "advancement" excluded the property transfer from being considered as part of James' inheritance. Other terms of the deed essentially created a life estate for Willis and Susan, meaning they owned the house until their death. This status is indicated in the 1920 Census that shows Willis as the head of the family and owner of the property free of mortgage. Living in the house with Willis and Susan at the time were four of their children, James, Alfred, McCarty, Susan and grandson Dowell Naylor.

During the years that followed, the children moved into their own homes. In 1923, James married Christelle Oneal and moved in with her parents who lived at 601 South Tennessee Street. Willis died in 1927 and his widow Susan lived in the house until her death in 1933. For the next few years James rented out the house while he and his wife lived on South Tennessee Street. One of his early tenants was Mrs. Nellie Hall.

In 1936, the Oneal home on South Tennessee was destroyed by fire. Subsequently, James with wife Christelle, son Jim Pat and mother-in-law Jeanette moved into the Bradley Street home whose address was sometimes known as 700 West Virginia Street.

In 1941, Jim Pat left home to attend SMU. After graduation he joined the Navy. Following WWII he took advantage of the G.I. Bill to attend Harvard and after receiving his Master's Degree in Electrical Engineering, he returned to Dallas to teach and work as a sales rep for several electronics manufactures. Meanwhile, his parents continued to live at 700 West Virginia Street.

James Dowell, Sr. died in 1953, followed by Christelle's death in 1979. With the house vacant, Jim Pat moved back to McKinney with his wife Patsy who he married in 1972. For the next several years, Jim Pat and wife Patsy made alterations to the interior of the house as well as enclosing the western facing porch. Otherwise, the exterior of the house is little changed from W.J. Higgins 1913 construction.

Jim Pat died in 1998 at the age of 74. Patsy Dowell continues to make 700 West Virginia her home.