

# City of McKinney

## Historic Building Marker Application

(Supporting Documentation)

### James H. Merritt House

510 Tucker Street



## A. Alterations & Construction

### Construction

The James H. Merritt House is currently a two-story, brick-veneer residential structure built on a pier-and-beam foundation. The cross-gable roof has a front-facing pavilion orient to the south flanked by a concrete porch stretching three-quarters the length of the front facade. The floor plan is asymmetrical. The interior flooring consists of hardwood throughout the house. The house is fenestrated with the original one-over-one sash windows.

The house design now follows the Prairie Style with its emphasis on horizontal lines. The structure's sturdy square columns and ribbons of grouped windows are typical elements of this style.

## **Alterations**

The house was originally built between 1897 and 1900 as a Queen-Anne-Style seven-room, wood-framed home. An early photo exists that shows the house as originally constructed with ridge-caps, a hip roof, second-story dormer, and turned porch columns with a ginger-bread trim. Since its original construction, the house has undergone two major remodeling efforts, first in 1915, then in 1923.

In 1915, the house was transformed into an Arts & Crafts Style house. Rooms were added to the second story which allowed for a gable roof to be expressed with extended eaves, knee bracing and exposed rafters. The turned-wood columns on the porch were replaced with sturdy, square columns on brick pedestals.

In 1923, the house was again transformed. This time the house took on the character of the Prairie Style. The house was completely sheathed in a multi-colored brick and the porch roof was removed. The overall effect gave the house a solid, stable, horizontal appearance.

The house experience little alteration until the 1950s when the owners at the time enclosed the sleeping porch on the east side of the house. At a later date, a laundry room was added to the rear of the house, which connects the house to a garage.

Many of the interior elements such as light fixtures, wall coverings, and cabinets remained intact until the house was updated in 2016. Still, most of the significant structural and architectural elements remain original.

## **Anticipated Needs**

The current owners are responsible for recently updating the electrical and plumbing systems at considerable expense. Other foundation and structural issues also have been address. Though the current owners have completed their remodeling of the interior, they intend to maintain the home's historical character as much as possible if and when further repairs are needed.

## **B. Historical Figures**

### **Henry Hawkins White (1868-1920)**

Henry H. White served as assistant cashier for the Collin County National Bank for nearly two decades and was among the founders of the Dallas Dry Goods Company in 1911.

Henry H. White was the son of Coleman and Clarissa White who were pioneer settlers near the town of Rock Hill in western Collin County. Around 1890, Henry started working at the Collin National Bank of McKinney where his older brother James was cashier. In these earlier days, the position of cashier was an officer of the bank, more like a what we might call a treasurer today. The Collin County National Bank was established in 1881 with G.A. Foote as president. Henry's brother James L. White was among its founding partners along with James W. Throckmorton, I.D. Newsome, Thomas B. Wilson, William A. Rhea, and R.M. Board.

In 1895, Henry purchased the lot in McKinney now known as 510 Tucker from J.A. Evans for \$1,200. Four years later, he married Bessie K. Howard, a 1895 graduate of McKinney High School. The 1900 Census shows the couple living on Tucker Street along with Bessie's mother Della Howard in a house that was free of a mortgage. The three of them lived together until Della's death at the beginning of 1910.

Around 1911, Henry's brother James left the bank after 30 years employment and moved to Dallas to become treasurer for the Republic Trust Company. Around that same time, Henry followed his brother's lead. Henry rented out his Tucker Street home, moved his family to Dallas and became associated with former McKinney resident Richard W. Burrage who was the brother-in-law of mill owner J. Perry Burrus. Henry and Mr. Burrage were principals in the Dallas Dry Goods Company, styled as the largest wholesale dry-goods company in the South. However, soon after the new company was up and running, it merged with a similar business in Fort Worth run by W.G. Burton. During this transition time, Henry left his association with the business, sold his McKinney home in 1915 and moved to Seeley, California.

In 1913, a couple of years before Henry moved west, his brother James was tragically murdered in his Dallas office by J.A. Clopton over a disagreement that arose from a real estate transaction. The case was tried twice because the first jury could not agree on Mr. Clopton's guilt.

Herny lived in California for about four years until his health forced him to seek the care of his family in McKinney. At some time between Herny's move to California and his return, he and his wife Bessie divorced. Henry died at the age of 52 of liver cancer in 1920 and was buried in the Pecan Grove Cemetery.

### **James H. Merritt (1881-1949)**

James H. Merritt began his career as a McKinney dry goods merchant and later moved to banking. In 1937, he was elected directory of the Federal Reserve of Dallas and went on to serve as its Chairman for six years.

James was born in McKinney, the son of Capt. William W. Merritt and Jennie (Compton) Merritt. During the Civil War, James' father served under General Joseph Shelby's command which was based in Arkansas and responsible for raids into Missouri. Though the Confederacy forces surrender in 1865, many of Shelby's men refused to disband and instead rode to Mexico to offer their services to Emperor Maximilian. The Emperor declined their assistance but did grant them land to start their own colony. However, James' father was not among them, instead he chose to settle in Collin County. In 1874, Capt. Merritt was elected Collin County Sheriff and later served four years in the Texas Legislature.

In 1898, James graduated from McKinney College Institute, a preparatory school that once existed at the corner of Board and Foote Street where the Arbors Off the Square apartment block now stands. Following James' graduation, he continued his education at the McKinney Business College established by Prof. Newton Richardson Stone in 1899. The school was an early success when it started in a house on West Virginia Street. Within four years of the school's inception, it trained over 400 young men and women to become bank tellers, stenographers and bookkeepers. In response to the college's growth, in 1904 Prof. Stone leased the third floor of a newly erected building just north of the Masonic Temple on Kentucky Street. As a student in the school's formative years, James Merritt landed a clerical position with W.S. Knight Dry Goods located on the south side of the Square.

James quickly rose through the ranks to become the W.S. Knight store manager. In 1910, James lived on Tucker Street<sup>1</sup> with his sister Minnie and brother-in-law Harry Q.

<sup>1</sup> The 1910 Census erroneously indicates that Harry Smith lives on Lamar Street.

Smith who was part owner in the drug store begun by his father Benjamin M.E. Smith in 1881. Next door to the Smiths (to the west) was the home of cotton dealer William Hynds, his wife Eudora and their only daughter Rosabel. James fell in love, literally, with the girl next door and the couple married in 1911.

The neighbor to the east of the Smiths was banker Henry H. White who left McKinney in January of 1912 to help start the Dallas Dry Goods Company in Dallas. In May of 1914, James and Rosabel purchased the house that is now at 510 Tucker Street.

James achieved financial success in the decade following the purchase of their house. He became the sole owner of the store he managed and change the name to J.H. Merritt Dry Goods. He became active in the Chamber of Commerce, the Lion's Club and the Rotary Club. He purchased property including a building previously owned by G.I. Wilcox at 210 N. Tennessee Street. The building was originally the home to Standard Garage but now houses City of McKinney offices.

In 1928, James sold his dry goods business to his competitor who changed its name to the McKinney Dry Goods Store. Around that same time, James became president of the First National Bank as the U.S. economy was sliding toward the Great Depression. While James was president, the bank merged with the Collin County National Bank in 1932. As a part of the merger, James voluntarily retired to give attention to his agricultural and other business interests. However, he continued to be a major stockholder.

In 1937, James accepted an appointment to the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas by its Board of Governors. The Bank is one of 12 Districts making up the Federal Reserve System. The District Banks are responsible for facilitating transactions between commercial banks and providing monetary policy input to the Board of Governors in Washington, D.C. James Merritt was appointed Chairman of Dallas district the following year. He served six years and continued to live in McKinney.

James and wife Rosabel had one child, James H. Merritt, Jr. who received an undergraduate degree from T.C.U. and a Master's degree in Business from Harvard in 1941. James, Jr. went on to become an agent for the FBI at Binghamton, New York. He left the FBI in 1952 and followed a career in banking in Dallas until his retirement in 1982.

In 1949, James Merritt, Sr. died at the age of 68 of heart disease. His wife Rosabel died less than two years later. They are both buried in the Pecan Grove Cemetery.

The City of McKinney honored James Merritt's lifetime of civic contributions to the City by naming the City's first Public Housing Project after him. The 86-unit complex known as Merritt Homes at 1200 N. Tennessee Street was built on 9.5 acres of land originally owned by Mr. Merritt but sold to the McKinney Housing Authority by his heirs.

### **William Clarence Dowdy (1891-1985)**

Clarence Dowdy, a graduate of Texas University Law School, served as Collin County attorney from 1923 to 1934. Following a decade of private practice, he served as Judge of the 59th District from 1944 to 1964 with jurisdiction in parts of Collin and Grayson Counties.

Clarence Dowdy was the son of Tennessee pioneer John and Lucy Dowdy who settled near Wylie in 1880. Clarence's parents moved to McKinney in 1909 in order to send their seven children to school. Clarence graduated from McKinney High School in 1912. He later received his law degree in 1916 and was admitted to the bar that same year. In 1917, the Selective Service System initiated its first round of draft registrations in preparation for World War I. This first round required men between the ages of 21 and 31 to register. Clarence was 25 years old at the time and in June of 1917 he registered for military service.

Clarence displayed a flippant attitude toward the registration process with his response to one of the questions on the official sign-up form. Question #12 asked "Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)?" Clarence wrote, "Yes, ruin my profession." Despite his complaint, he enlisted into the Army in May of 1918. He traveled to Augusta, Georgia for basic training before being shipped out for overseas duty. However, a couple of weeks before he was scheduled to depart, Clarence managed to secure enough leave-time to wed Emily Gilson, a woman he had met at the University of Texas. The wedding took place at 10 pm on a Friday but only after the wedding party, including bride and groom, made a late-night visit to a judge's home to secure a valid marriage license. In August, Clarence was deployed to France.

Clarence was part of the American Expeditionary Force involved in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive which had as its goal to capture the railway hub at Sedan, France in order to break the railway network that was supporting the German army. The offensive was one of a series of attacks known as the Hundred Days Offensive which brought an end to the war. The battle at Sedan cost over 26,000 American lives and is often cited as the second-deadliest battle in American history.

When the war ended in November of 1918, Clarence remained in Europe in order to engaged in postgraduate work at the Inns of Court in London. He returned to McKinney in August of 1919. Upon his return home, he resumed his law practice and was appointed to the position of assistant prosecuting attorney until being elected to the County Attorney Office in 1930, a position he held for four years.

Following his work for the County, Clarence worked in private practice for nearly a decade. He initially worked in the office of G.R. Smith, but later on his own. In 1944, Texas Governor Coke Stevenson appointed Clarence as Judge of the 59th District Court to fill the office left vacant with the resignation of Judge Tom Suggs. When Clarence's term ended, he ran unopposed and was elected to the office. He held the position for five consecutive terms, having been elected each time without opposition.

Clarence retired from the bench in December of 1964 at the age of 73. In his retirement, he sat as a judge when needed and continued his involvement in civic affairs. Some of his involvement included, being president of the Collin County Bar Association and president of the Lions Club. He was a commander of the American Legion and a 33rd-degree Mason. He taught Sunday at the Trinity Presbyterian Church and was elected County Chairman of the Democratic Party from 1940 to 1942.

Clarence and his wife Emily had three children, Eugenia, William, Jr. and James. In 1953, after the children were grown the couple move out of their house at 1015 Coleman and purchased the house at 510 Tucker Street from James H. Merritt, Jr. for \$13,000. Emily hosted parties in the house for civic groups the she was associated with including the Anniversary Club and the Sesame Club.

Emily died in 1981. When Clarence died in 1985, the home passed to his son William and his wife Martha Ann (Atkinson). Emily and Clarence are buried at the Pecan Grove Cemetery.

## C. Property Ownership

**Address:** 510 Tucker Street, McKinney, Texas 75069

**Legal Description:** McKinney Outlots, Lot 658

Purchase Date	Seller	Buyer
Sep. 6, 1850 <sup>1</sup>	State of Texas	William Davis
Jan. 2, 1855	William Davis <sup>2</sup>	Joseph B. Wilmeth
Apr. 10, 1855	Joseph B. Wilmeth	Robert L. Waddill
Nov. 15, 1861	Robert L. Waddill	John M. Todd
Jan. 18, 1862	John M. Todd	J.B. Stiff
Dec. 10, 1877	J.B. Stiff	R.M. Board
Feb. 28, 1894	R.M. Board	J.A. Evans
Feb. 4, 1895	J.A. Evans	Henry H. White
Apr. 28, 1914	Henry H. White	R.C. Merritt
May 2, 1914	R.C. Merritt	James H. Merritt
Nov. 7, 1953	James H. Merritt, Jr. <sup>3</sup>	William C. Dowdy, Sr.
Apr. 16, 1987	estate of W.C. Dowdy, Sr. <sup>4</sup>	William C. Dowdy, Jr.
Apr. 6,, 2016	William C. Dowdy, III <sup>5</sup>	Justin Douglas
Jun. 26, 2001	Justin Douglas	JCB Notex Properties
Jan. 20, 2017	JCB Notex Properties	John Bearg

<sup>1</sup> Date of patent by the State of Texas.

<sup>2</sup> Davis was forced to sell to settle a court action against him.

<sup>3</sup> Heir to property following Rosabel Merritt's death

<sup>4</sup> William C. Dowdy, Jr. acquired the home upon his father's death

<sup>5</sup> William C. Dowdy, III became heir to his mother's estate

## D. Tenant History

The tenant history is the same as the ownership history except for when H.H. White rented the house to E.M. Perkins from 1912 to 1914.