



# CITY OF MCKINNEY, TEXAS

## Legislation Details (With Text)

**File #:** 20-041HTM      **Name:** Historic Marker 313 N Benge  
**Type:** Agenda Item      **Status:** Approved  
**In control:** Historic Preservation Advisory Board  
**On agenda:** 11/5/2020      **Final action:** 11/5/2020  
**Title:** Conduct a Public Hearing to Consider/Discuss/Act on the Request by Lawrence and Nina Ringley for Approval of a Historic Marker for the House Located at 313 North Benge Street

**Indexes:**

**Attachments:** 1. Application, 2. History, 3. Presentation

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
11/5/2020	1	Historic Preservation Advisory Board	Approved	Pass

Conduct a Public Hearing to Consider/Discuss/Act on the Request by Lawrence and Nina Ringley for Approval of a Historic Marker for the House Located at 313 North Benge Street

**COUNCIL GOAL:** Enhance the Quality of Life in McKinney

**MEETING DATE:** November 5, 2020

**DEPARTMENT:** Planning

**CONTACT:** Guy R. Giersch, Historic Preservation Officer  
Mark Doty, Assistant Director of Planning

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff is recommending approval of a historic marker for 313 North Benge Street.

**PRIORITY RATING:** The property is listed as a high priority building according to the 2015 update of the Historic Resource Survey. A high priority building contributes significantly to local history or broader historic patterns; is an outstanding or unique example of architecture, engineering or crafted design; retains a significant portion of its original character and contextual integrity; meets in some cases, criteria for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and/or is eligible for a Texas Historical Marker.

**ITEM SUMMARY:** The purpose of the Historic Marker Program is to encourage owners of historic properties to become actively involved in the preservation of McKinney’s historic past through the recognition of historic events, people, and architecture. The applicant has submitted a written narrative relating the history of the various families that have owned the property or resided at 313 North Benge Street and the role they played in McKinney’s history. On July 22, 2020 the applicant submitted the necessary documentation to apply for a historic marker for the house located at 313 North Benge Street known as the Ditto-Dowell House.

The Ditto-Dowell House was built in 1913, by local architect, Arthur Whitney Dowlen, for realtor William Ernest Ditto. The house is an example of a Prairie School and American Foursquare house constructed on an asymmetrical plan that was popular between 1900 and 1920. The house is a two-story, wood, weatherboard sided house constructed on a pier and beam foundation. The porch wraps across the east and south side of the house. The front porch has three bays. The front door is located at the northeast end of the front porch with a gable that forms a pediment that is supported by paired, square columns. The square columns combined with a hipped dormer centrally located, clearly demarcate the location of the front door. This is a detail often used in the

American Foursquare style. The front door is a two-panel door with a single light surrounded by two-panel sidelights with a single light located above the wood panels. The house combines gabled and hipped roofs. The hipped roof rises above an intersecting cross-gable roof. The eaves are boxed with a pair of jig-sawn brackets that are used to create a sense of support and decoration.

The front porch is a three-bay porch supported with paired, square-wood columns. The porch wraps around to the south side of the house and forms a sleeping porch on the second floor. A pedimented eave is located above this front porch like that found on the front of the house. The house is covered with wood clapboard siding and is fenestrated using one-over-one sashes. Some of the sashes are mulled into groups of two and three windows

The house has experienced minimal alterations since it was built in 1913. A small utility room has been added to the rear of the house. The current owner has no plans to expand. She is committed to maintaining the Prairie/American Foursquare aesthetic of the house.

Associated with the Ditto-Dowell House is a very significant structure. It is the Foote barn, circa 1890. The barn is constructed on land owned by Gerard Alexander Foote (1823-1902). The barn was incorporated as part of the sale of the land. In 1915 Ernest constructed a detached garage on the property. Both buildings are significant because they still exist as early examples of utilitarian buildings. The property has remnants of G. A. Foote nameplate on a wrought iron fence with limestone posts and iron gates, an iron hitching post, and a well.

## **HISTORICAL FIGURES ASSOCIATED WITH THE HOUSE:**

### **William Ernest Ditto (1864 - 1929)**

Ernest Ditto was born in Kentucky in 1864 to farmer Lewis C. Ditto and wife Sarah E. Hall. Ernest moved to McKinney while in his early 20's. In 1889 he married Lula Wiley, daughter of Dr. W.T. Wiley and Susan E. Henderson of McKinney.

Ernest began his business career in the grocery business with fellow Kentuckian, Henry Lewis. In 1896 Henry became a cotton trader while Earnest stayed in the grocery business with a store on the east side of the McKinney Square next to Smith Drug.

Within a month of taking over the business fire broke out on the east side of the Square and destroyed his inventory. Ernest responded quickly and set up a temporary business just east of the J.P. Dowell Hardware until he could move back into his building.

Ernest operated from his shop on the east side of the Square until 1909. He survived fires in 1896, 1904, and 1906 while thriving in a highly competitive market. In 1902 there were 17 grocers serving a city of 4,500. Page 3 of 5

While managing a grocery business Ernest was an active mule trader, farmer, and dealer in real estate.

In 1913 a fire killed his wife Lula; while Ernest, Elizabeth, and Carlisle were out visiting. Eventually Ernest and the children moved into the newly constructed house on North Benge Street.

In October of 1919, at the age of 55, Ernest married Mamie Dowell. Ernest Dowell became a representative of the Federal Farm Loan Bank in Houston and began offering loans from his office on the North side of the Square above where Layered is today.

At the end of 1928 Ernest's health began to deteriorate and in August of 1929 Ernest Ditto died of heart failure at the age of 65. He is buried along with his first wife at Pecan Grove Cemetery.

### **Marie Blanche "Mamie Dowell (1876-1974)**

Taught elocution in the McKinney Public Schools and served three separate terms as president of the Owl Club. It is the oldest, continually operating literary-service organization in McKinney.

Mamie was born in McKinney in 1876. Her early education focused her attention on the arts. In 1894 she graduated from the McKinney Collegiate Institute. Three years later she graduated from Mary Hardin Baylor College in Belton, Texas. She accepted a teaching position in Greenville but returned a few years later to McKinney.

In 1900 she sought additional educational opportunities in Boston and Chicago while teaching at the Jones Academy and McKinney Public schools.

In 1901, at the age of 25, she joined the McKinney Owl Club, a literary organization established in 1893. The Club provided books for rural schools and supported city beautification. The Club emphasized art, culture, and women's education.

In November of 1919 she married Ernest Ditto. Following the wedding they moved to 313 North Benge. After Mamie married Ernest she retired from teaching and focused on Owl Club activities. Mamie was an active participant at the First Baptist Church.

Ernest asked Mamie to not sell the house. Mamie continued to live in the house after his death. Mamie eventually invited her unmarried sister Ruth, to live with her in 1967. Mamie died in 1974 and Ruth continued to live in the house until her death in 1991 and was buried in the J.S. Dowell family plot at Pecan grove cemetery.

### **Gerard Alexander Foote (1823-1902)**

Gerard A. Foote was one of McKinney's early pioneer settlers. He was a physician and drug Store merchant and helped to establish Collin County Bank in 1881 and served as bank president for 20 years.

Foote was born in Virginia in 1823. At the age of nine the family moved to Mississippi. The Foote family was related to the U.S. Senator from Mississippi, Henry S. Foote while Gerard's mother, Jane Washington who was related to George Washington.

In 1836 Foote began to study medicine. He graduated in 1856 and went on to practice medicine for 20 years.

Foote was a surgeon in the Civil War. He was politically active. He served in the Texas Legislature in 1865 and again in 1874. He was friends with Sam Houston and James Throckmorton.

Foote and his wife, Eliza Jane McGarran 'Foote' constructed their house on Benge and today the barn is the only building left standing and today, is the only part of the Foote estate that is left standing on North Benge Street.

**Arthur Whitney Dowlen (1865-1947)**

Arthur Dowlen was a successful builder in McKinney during the first two decades of the 20th Century.

Arthur taught and eventually became a builder. One of his first projects was to build a parsonage for the Cumberland Presbyterian Church located at the corner of Church and Davis.

From 1905 -1915 Arthur was a prolific builder in McKinney. In 1915 he owned the McKinney Manufacturing Company which made building components such as doors, moldings, windows, desks, and cedar chests.

Arthur constructed the William Ernest Ditto house located at 313 North Benge in 1913.

**ASSESSMENT:** Staff believes that the applicant has met all the requirements to obtain a Historic Marker under the Historic Neighborhood Improvement Zone Program (Ordinance 2015-12-105). Therefore, Staff is recommending approval of a Historic Marker for 313 North Benge Street. Under Ordinance 2015-12-105, if the HPAB approves the Marker, the applicant will be responsible for purchasing and displaying the Historic Marker. Page 5 of 5

Also, under Ordinance 2015-12-105, if the Historic Preservation Advisory Board approves the Marker, the applicant may make application for a Level 1 tax exemption (100% exemption of the City's ad valorem taxes for a period of 7 years) providing the building has architectural integrity and has been properly rehabilitated/restored and maintained. The building must have a residential use in order to qualify for the tax exemption.