

THE MCKINNEY NAME IS HONORED

*By Mary M. Frye**

It was shortly after the turn of the century when Hallie McKinney of Bonham, Texas, went with her brother, James Robert McKinney, to see the location of the proposed Normal School at Durant, Oklahoma. When the Durant banker and his sister had made a rather tiring trip over uninviting roads 'back to town', Hallie had one comment.

"There's one thing I'd like to know, Jim. Why couldn't they pick either Durant or Caddo? Why did they have to decide to put it out here so far from both towns?"

On June 1, 1951, Southeastern State College—no longer the Normal School—celebrated its forty-second birthday by naming its new women's residence hall for Hallie McKinney. No 'tiring trips into the country' are necessary to reach Hallie McKinney Hall or any other of the nine buildings of the college; for the beautiful campus adjoins the main residence section of Durant.

For the three hundred people who gathered at the newly-named hall, the dedication party was a happy occasion. President T. T. Montgomery had received the heartiest support from the Board of Regents when he suggested that the dormitory be named for Hallie McKinney, member of Southeastern's first faculty and the College's first dean of women. Friends who gathered to congratulate "Miss Hallie," now retired and living in Durant, echoed this hearty approval. Roses and orchids vied with sincere compliments as college officials, representatives of the board of regents, and other friends honored one of Oklahoma's most distinguished teachers.

"I knew how Texas felt about the McKinneys," said Judge Henry Cunningham of Bonham, who was the "voice from Texas" at the dedication program. "Now I see you Oklahoma people feel the same way."

It was in 1900 that Bonham saw the first of the McKinneys go over into Indian Territory, when the Durant National Bank was founded. Relatives and friends were disturbed, not only at losing Jim McKinney, but because he was going "so far away" and into "such wild country." The John Wesley Newmans, staunch Presbyterians in spite of the name, persuaded their daughter Blanche, who was Mrs. Jim McKinney, to stay in Bonham until Jim was settled, or until he had decided to give up his preposterous venture and return to "civilized country."

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Jim did not give up his venture. For a time he returned to Bonham for week-end visits, riding horseback and carrying the bank's money in his saddle-bags. In hunting season the money shared space with quail in the saddle-bags. During the week he slept with the bank's capital under his pillow. By 1902 his family was with him in Durant, and his brother Buck soon afterward became associated with him in the Durant National. "The wild Indian country across Red River" began to look less formidable to Bonham relatives and friends.

Jim and Buck McKinney were a part of every progressive movement in Durant. When churches were built, the McKinney brothers were quick to lend their support. Members of the Christian Church, they were instrumental in erecting the building the congregation still uses, while Jim McKinney played a prominent part in the construction of the Presbyterian Church, in which his wife worshipped. For many years Buck's wife, Lucile Geers McKinney, was organist for the Christian Church, while Blanche McKinney performed the same service for the Presbyterians.

Prospects of getting a State Normal School at Durant stirred the enthusiasm of the brothers. Their lack of formal education had deepened their regard for higher education and its opportunities. "Workers they were, every one of them," said Judge Henry Cunningham at the Hallie McKinney Hall dedication, as he recalled the early days of the McKinney boys and girls in Bonham.

Their mother, born Rebecca Abernathy in Pulaski, Tennessee, met Thomas Clark McKinney, native of Fayetteville, Arkansas, when he was a student at the Missouri school, of which her step-father and mother were in charge. After their marriage they settled in McKinney, Texas, where Tom McKinney was associated with Colonel Tom Murray in the dry goods business. After Colonel Murray's death, Tom began working for the Singer Sewing Machine company. One of Hallie McKinney's most treasured possessions is a silver pitcher the Singer company gave her father for selling more machines in his area than any other representative.

Tom McKinney died young, leaving his wife with seven young children and little money. The family, accompanied by the children's paternal grandmother, went to Bonham where Rebecca McKinney's parents operated Carlton College, a school similar to the one they had in Missouri.

"Grandma McKinney," widow of a Presbyterian lay preacher and farmer, was the key figure in the home she and her daughter-in-law established across from Carlton College. Stronger physically than her daughter-in-law, Grandma McKinney was also a tower of strength and resourcefulness. "But she was severe!" Hallie McKinney recalls. "Too severe, I thought then." Grandma, deeply religious, shrewd, and industrious, had no patience with dirt nor

laziness; when she made a decision, she stuck to it and followed it through.

There was the time she took Hallie, a small girl, out into the country to visit relatives. Hallie's mother had packed the little girl's "best clothes" for her to wear to Sunday School. Hallie could hardly wait to put on the freshly-laundered white dress, pink sash and hair-ribbons, and pink stockings. But when Sunday School time came, Grandma got out a plain gingham. Hallie cried and pleaded, insisting that her mother had planned for her to wear her best dress. "These children out here don't have clothes like that," said Grandma. "You will wear the gingham." Hallie's weeping increased, approaching hysterics; but Grandma was not to be moved. The little girl did not wear the finery with which she had expected to impress the community. Furthermore, she spent the Sunday School hour locked in the smokehouse.

In spite of their connections with Carlton College, the McKinney boys had little schooling, since the institution was primarily a girls' boarding school. Jim's recollections of "college duties" were principally milking cows, carrying wood, and other chores. Dick, Ed, Jess, and Buck had similar tasks. Buck's special duty was selling the vegetables which Grandma McKinney raised in her garden. Hallie and her sister Alice went to school and helped with housework.

Hallie recalls telling her mother that there were two things she would never do when she was grown. She would not wash dishes and she would not go to school in summer. "Mama always told me never to say 'I won't do something' or I'd end up doing it. Well, I went into home economics and I wish I had a penny for every dish I've washed. And for twenty-seven years I was going to school and teaching, summer and winter."

Grandma McKinney outlived her daughter by several years. Hallie recalls that she was somewhat confused and embarrassed by the way Grandma reacted to her mother's death. She went right on with the churning and other chores; there were no evidences of mourning. "When someone as good as your mother dies, there's nothing to grieve about," was Grandma's explanation. After Grandma McKinney died, Alice and Hallie taught at Carlton College and made a home for their brothers, until the boys began to marry and make homes of their own.

In 1909 the two sisters went to Durant to become members of the first faculty of the State Normal. In addition to their study and teaching at Carlton College, they had both attended Chicago University. Hallie McKinney later went to Columbia University, New York, where she received a master's degree in personnel and guidance. At the Normal Alice taught music and Hallie taught home economics.

In Durant the sisters made a home modeled after the one in Bonham, where Carlton College teachers and other friends had

always found good talk in the living-room and good food in the kitchen.

The late Kenneth Kaufman, another member of the first South-eastern faculty who went on to the language department at Oklahoma University, used to recall the McKinney sisters' home as one he could never forget. "And when they were looking for a dean of women up here at the University, I told them they ought to try to get Hallie McKinney, and their troubles would all be over," Professor Kaufman once said.

The nieces and nephews will never forget their aunts' home, either. A visit there was always an adventure. When a family dinner was held in "Aunt-Alice-and-Hallie's" home, there was no "second table" for the children. They were always served first, instead of having "to wait" as was the procedure in other relatives' houses.

In 1916 Alice McKinney died, and the following year Hallie McKinney was made dean of women at Southeastern under the administration of T. D. Brooks, now at Baylor University. "When I learned President Brooks wanted to see me that day, I started going over menus in my mind," said Miss Hallie, who was famous for her luncheons, one of the first of which was for Oklahoma's first governor, Charles Haskell. "I was sure he wanted a dinner of some kind. When I went into his office, he said he had good news. Then I thought, 'A new stove for my department!' When he said he wanted me to be dean of women, I could hardly believe what I was hearing." The title was actually the only new thing about the position, however. For years Hallie McKinney had been counseling girls who had learned to go to "Miss Hallie" when a problem arose.

One of her former students was recently recalling her days in the home economics department. "Miss Hallie was always about twenty years ahead of her time. They are just now getting things in the textbooks that she taught us years ago. As Dean of women, she was just as modern." Hallie McKinney is not sure about that "modern" description of her work. She thinks that much of the success attributed to her career can be traced straight to Grandma McKinney.

Southeastern's first dean of women is the only one of the McKinney brothers and sisters left. Dick, who went into the lumber business and who, as Buck always said, "had more brains than the rest of us put together," died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty-three. Pneumonia caused the death of Alice McKinney in 1916.

In 1923, Jim McKinney died at the age of fifty-six, three years after the death of his brother Ed, who had established a hardware business in Durant a few years earlier, after operating similar businesses in Bonham and Honey Grove, Texas. A year after Jim's death, his brother, Jess McKinney, Honey Grove banker, died.

Jim's death occurred in Durant, which had truly become his home and the center of his life. The difficult depression years, which came early in Southern Oklahoma, had taken their toll of his physical strength; but his spirit and faith in "the wild country across the river" persisted. "It was like being married to a doctor those last years," his wife used to say. "In the middle of the night calls would come from 'sick' banks, asking for help which he never refused."

During those last years Jim McKinney was also made president of the State National Bank in Denison, in addition to his connection with the Durant National and other banks in southern Oklahoma. His friends and physicians urged him to move to Denison. "If you'll move to Denison and start acting like a bank president and keeping 'banker's hours,' you may live a long time," they told him. "You can't keep on here in Durant. Every person who comes into the bank thinks he has to see you personally, no matter if he has nothing more on his mind than a sick pig."

Jim McKinney moved to Denison, but he was able to go to the bank only a few times. When death came, it was in the house in which Alice and Hallie McKinney had lived in Durant, for the family home had been sold.

In 1936 Buck McKinney, who had gone from Durant to become a prominent figure in Dallas banks and as governor of the Federal Reserve, followed his brothers and sister in death.

Except for a few years when she went to Dallas to keep house for her brother Buck, after his wife's death, then to be a resident counselor at Hockaday School, Dallas, Hallie McKinney has lived in Durant since the day she and her sister Alice left their Bonham home forty-two years ago to become teachers at the new Normal School in Durant.

The recounting of all these events, and many others, had a part in the dedication of Hallie McKinney Hall at Southeastern State College on June 1.

"We are honoring, first of all, a distinguished teacher whose inspired service will always be remembered," said President Montgomery. "We are also honoring a family whose spirit has left its mark on the history of Southern Oklahoma and Northern Texas."