

Chapter 3

THE McCLELLANS OF WASHINGTON COUNTY, TEXAS

The last of the Smith families to arrive in Texas appears to have been Juliet Lewis Smith McClellan, her husband, William Beavers McClellan, and their nine children, who arrived in Texas in December 1841.^[374] Where the McClellans first arrived is not known. The odds are, however, that they went to Old Franklin where Juliet's brother, Thomas I. Smith, is known to have settled. There too may have been her sister, Ann Smith Stokes, although Ann could have been living in the Houston area since that is where she lived when she applied for her land grant in 1840. Presumably unknown to the McClellans before their arrival in Texas was the death of Juliet's brother, Abram Smith, who had been killed in the Indian encounter four months before, in August 1841. Mail traveled slowly then, and in any event Texas had a terrible postal system. Also it seems that the McClellans came by land from western Tennessee, a trip that would have taken quite a while, if not several months, depending on weather and any illnesses in the group. The McClellans no doubt stopped to visit Juliet's brother, John Ingles Smith, who was living in Arkansas. Such visits typically could last for days or even weeks since, due to the difficulties in travel, families living far apart rarely got to see one another. The visit would also offer a respite from the travails of the journey over poor roads and camping out when there were no homes of friends or relatives in which to stay.

Juliet Smith McClellan is the first of the Smith women for which there is a surviving portrait, written by the daughter of her youngest son in about 1928, 43 years after her death.^[375] From this material, submitted for a book by Ann Pickrell and later published in 1939, it is possible to get something of a picture of William B. McClellan's character and a much more detailed depiction of Juliet Lewis Smith McClellan. This account of William and Juliet's lives is idealized by their granddaughter with some undocumented speculations and is given to emotional overtones, typical of many writings of "the good old days", but cutting through this, a picture of the people and events in their lives can be seen.

By the time of the McClellan's 1841 winter migration from Tennessee to Texas, the couple were in their late thirties and had nine children ranging from 18 to infancy. Juliet McClellan "rode the many miles intervening between Tennessee and Texas on horseback, her baby in her arms." ^[376] This

baby must have been Rebecca McClellan, just a newborn, since her next oldest sibling, Mary, had been born in January 1840. Little Rebecca was to be the first McClellan child to die in Texas, never making it past childhood. It was a sad prophecy of things to come. Although Juliet McClellan rode horseback, it is probable that there were wagons or carts since Texas immigrants were urged to bring provisions to see them through the months until they could put in a crop and harvest it. There is evidence that they carried some furnishings with them since William B. McClellan is believed to have brought a hunt chest.[\[377\]](#)

In August 1841, the same month of Abram Smith's death and some four months before the McClellans' arrival, the citizens of Old Franklin, then located in Milam County, "had built a fort around a wooden school house as a precaution against the Indians." [\[378\]](#) Even the family of Alexander Patrick, who had arrived in April 1841 in Cairo on the Trinity River, retreated for a while to this fortified area to escape the Indian raids. Fortunately, the inhabitants of Old Franklin never had to "fort up," but the fortification indicates the difficulty the settlers faced regarding the Indians.

William B. McClellan and his son, John J. McClellan, like the other Smith families who preceded them, applied for land grants when the required condition of three years of residency in Texas was met. Concerning the land issue, things are a little confusing. According to the Texas Land Office William B. McClellan received 640 acres of land. This was a third class headright issued to those arriving after October 1837, but before January 1, 1840, and requiring a three year residency, which William McClellan achieved on January 1, 1844. Yet it was acknowledged that William B. McClellan arrived in Texas December 1841. One possible explanation was that William McClellan and his son, John J. McClellan, had come to Texas, established residency, and then returned to Tennessee for the rest of the family. On October 5, 1846, according to Land Office records, the Land Commissioners "deemed William B. McClellan entitled to 640 acres in Milam County after proving three years residency in the Republic of Texas."

Eventually, after receiving the certificate, the Land Office records show that a survey was done "for William B. McClelland (sic) 85 miles north of San Antonio River, 35 miles west of Trinity River on Mill Creek, a branch of Chambers Creek, being the quality to which he is entitled (Ellis Co.)." [\[379\]](#) This is in the area where the Howe settlement was established in the upper Robertson County. It is apparent that the oldest McClellan child, John J. McClellan, also claimed land in the upper Robertson

County area. He is shown on the tax records of Navarro County in 1849 as being taxed for 313 acres in the John J. McClellan survey.[\[380\]](#)

Hence, upon examination of land records and with knowledge of what other members of the various Smith families did, it would appear that the McClellans might have had some idea of settling in the Howe Settlement area of the upper Robertson County along with other members of the Smith families. In the end John J. McClellan did move to that area with his wife later in the decade. This was some three years after Thomas I. Smith and his Stokes nephews moved there. William B. McClellan, however, seems to have decided to settle in Washington County, certainly a safer place regarding the Indians.

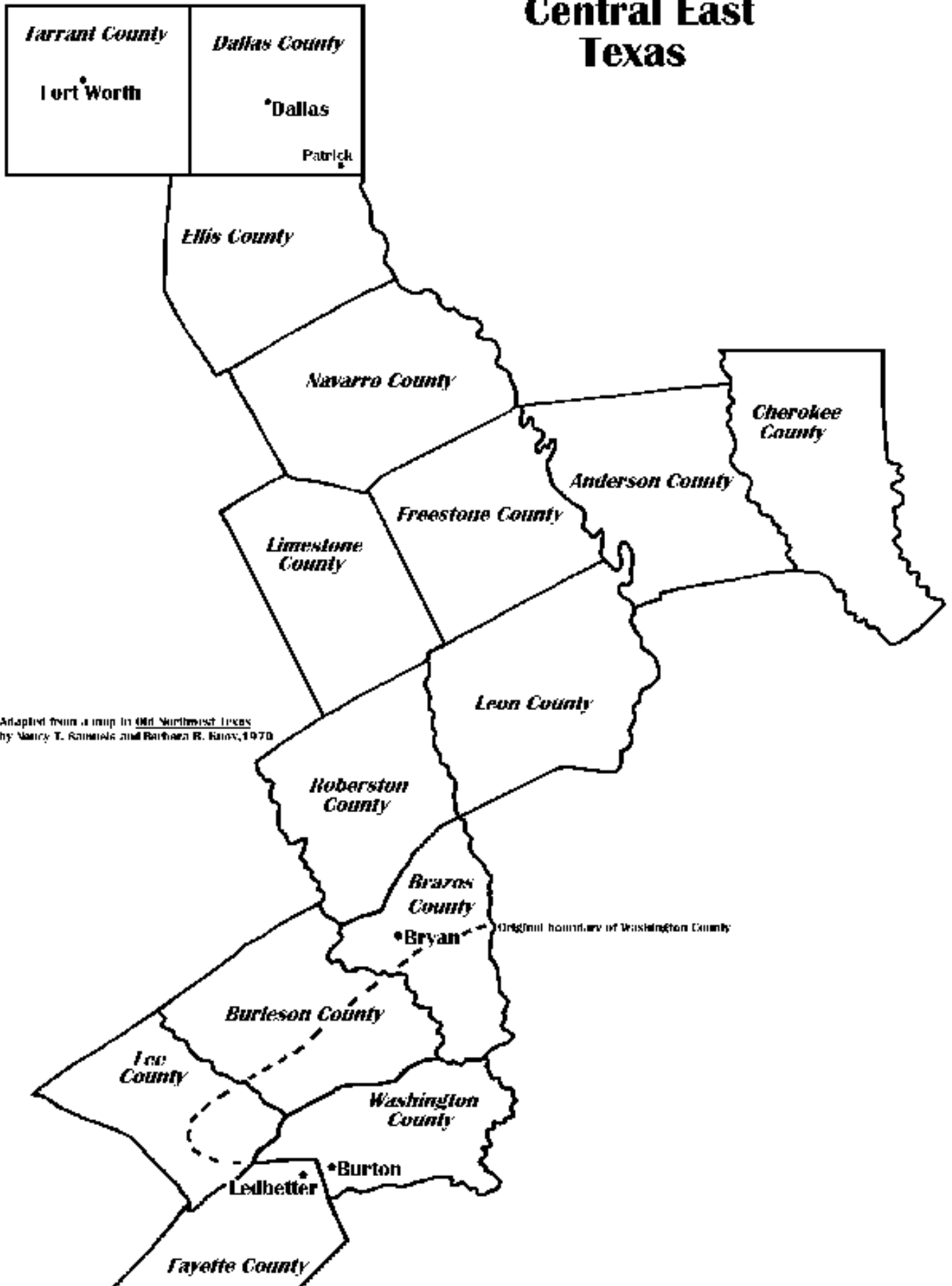
There can only be conjecture about the McClellan family's decision to live in Washington County instead of going north with the others. From the information written by the McClellan descendant for the 1939 Pickrell book, it appears that

Juliet McClellan had an active concern about the education of her children. While the older of the children would have been educated in Madison County, Tennessee, the younger members of the family would have had limited access to education on the northwest frontier of Texas. Perhaps, by illustration, the experience of another Texas settler would explain the situation. Shapley P. Ross, who achieved much fame later as a Texas Ranger, had arrived in Texas in 1838, about three years before the McClellans. He and his family settled in Central Texas, near present Belton. "A schoolhouse had been erected in the Ross neighborhood and a teacher had been employed. For some reason the school had not prospered." Ross remembered the "predictions of his relatives when they were trying to dissuade him from going to Texas. Finally, one of them had remarked in derision:

'Ah well, let him go. In a few years he will come back from Texas in an old cart drawn by a crop-eared mule, and he will be followed by a gang of yellow dogs covered with mange. In that cart, and walking behind it, will sit a set of ignorant boobies, who would not know a school house from a hog pen or a schoolmaster from a Hottentot.' " [\[381\]](#) Ross decided then to move to Austin so that his children could be adequately educated. It may be that Juliet felt the same way.

Another factor in the decision to locate in Washington County may have been the presence of Juliet's nephew, John S. Jones, in Washington County. When John moved to Washington County is unknown. John applied for his land grant at the same time that his uncles Thomas and Abram Smith did on May 22, 1839, in Milam County. From this record it appears that John was a single man since the grant was for 320 acres, that due for a single man. Later census records, however, indicate that John married Mary Webb around 1832 since their first child appears to have been born in 1834 in Texas. There is a time conflict here. If John S. Jones had emigrated by 1834 and was a married man, why would he have applied for 320 acres stating that he had arrived in Texas in January 1839? When John married Mary Webb, he appears to have married into the Hugh and Lucy Kerr family of Washington

Central East Texas



Adapted from a map in *Old Northwest Texas*
by Nancy T. Ramsdale and Barbara R. Kaye, 1970

County. The Kerrs, according to a historical marker, moved from Tennessee and “started the Kerr Settlement...in 1831.”

It would appear then that the McClellan family lived in Milam County for the first four or so years of their residency in Texas. Since their tenth and last child stated later that he was born in Washington County in 1846, apparently the family was living there by that time. It was in this year, 1846, that William B. McClellan appears on the tax list for Washington County. He is shown as having 200 acres of land worth \$200 (\$1 per acre), one Negro of \$500 value, three horses and mules worth \$200, 40 cattle, oxen, and a wagon.

The first location in Washington County where the McClellans lived was called Sand Town, according to a great grandson, D. T. Gilliland. Sand Town, now gone, was about seven miles west of Burton and about six miles north of Carmine and it was supposedly here that William McClellan established a general merchandise store.[\[382\]](#)

Although the McClellan descendant, D. T. Gilliland, wrote that the McClellans stayed in Sand Town, it appears that the family later made a slight move to a place four miles north of Burton, Texas which became known as McClellan’s Store Settlement. “The trading store he established served the pioneers of the western part of Washington County....McClellan’s Store Settlement included a Masonic Lodge, a store, a school, a church and a cemetery.” [\[383\]](#)

The Masonic Lodge, store, school, church and cemetery were to come later, many years later. The first order of business for any new resident was housing, and William McClellan built an unusual home. It was entirely of cedar, from the cedar planks of the floor to the cedar shingles of the roof. It appears that William and Juliet lived in this house for the remainder of their lives.[\[384\]](#) This is not to say that there were no additions or alterations made, but the cedar house, whatever its later form, was to be “homebase” for the McClellan children and grandchildren in the years to come.

In the writings of the McClellan granddaughter in 1928, William B. McClellan was described as “a man of stern integrity, efficient, far-seeing, strict in his business methods, a stay and a comfort to all about him....No swapping of horse-lies was to be done in his store, no political wrangling were to take place beneath his business roof and men learned early and a little thoroughly that it was best always to respect the Merchant’s wishes.” This is not to say that William McClellan would not dicker a little for “the price of a yard of calico or a pair of boots, falling a wee bit sometimes from the first marked price,” [\[385\]](#) but he made a fair enough profit to provide for all his family members and beyond, as well as for himself and Juliet.

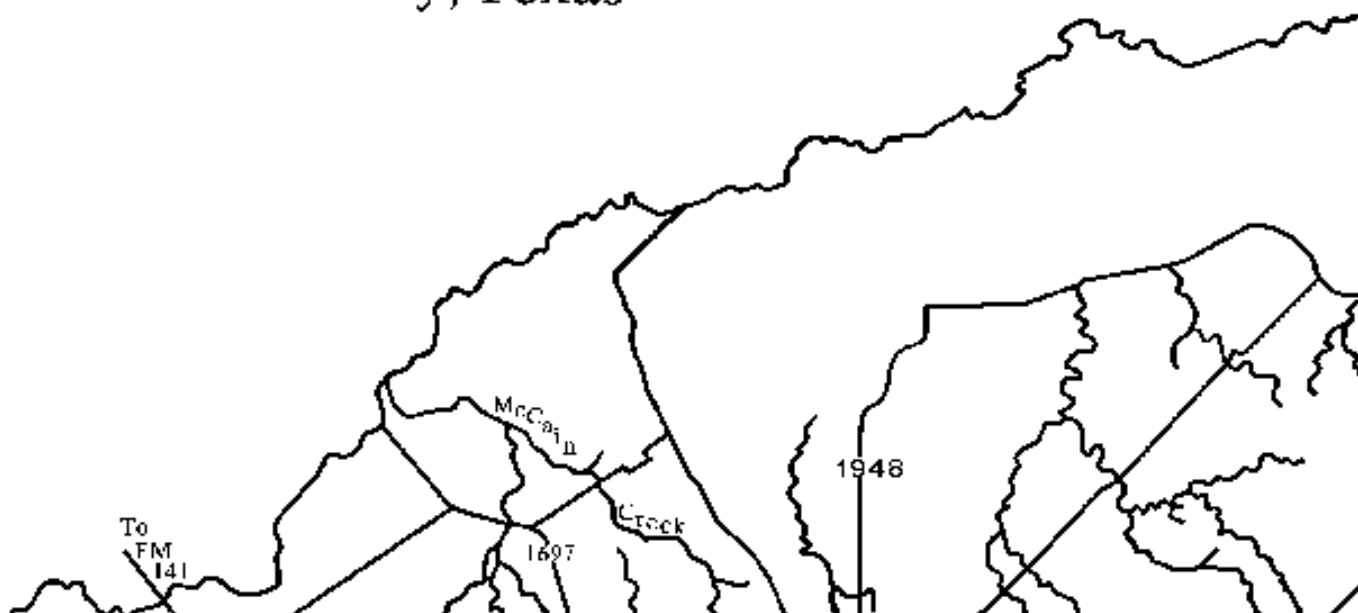
Meanwhile Juliet was, typical for her time, the primary caretaker of the 10 McClellan children. Many of the McClellan children were approaching adulthood at the same time that Juliet was bearing

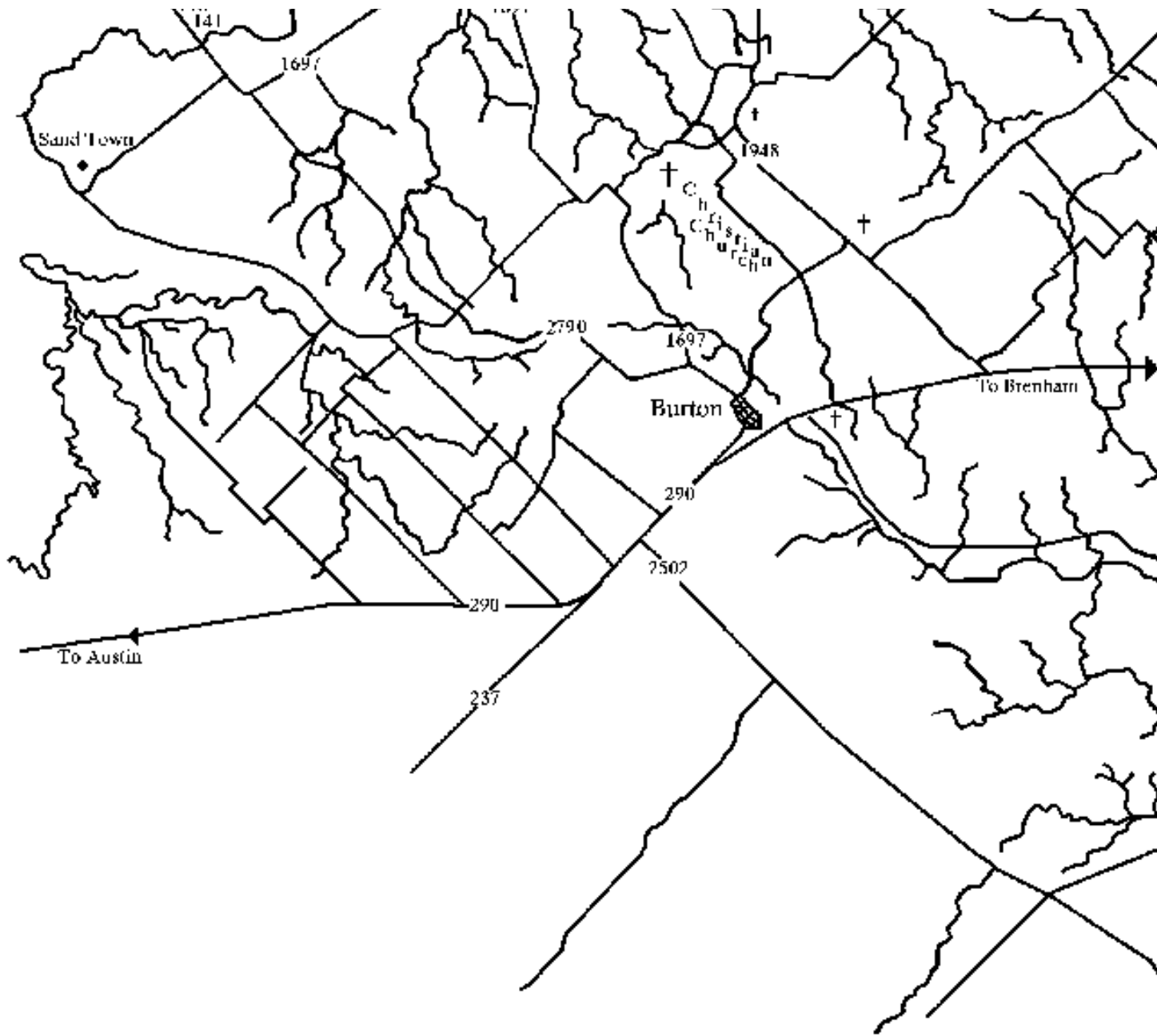
her tenth and last child, William Robert McClellan, in 1846. The oldest McClellan child, John J. McClellan, had married Susan J. Brown the year before on July 3, 1845. [386] In the next three years the three oldest McClellan girls were married. Rhoda Jane (“Janie”) [387] married Haynie Gilliland three days after Christmas, on December 28, 1847. In 1848 on August 3, Susan married Abram McCain, the son of Austin Colony settlers, and Martha (“Mattie”) married school teacher Charles Dunn on October 24. The first surviving grandchild of the McClellans appears to have been William Eli Gilliland, born November 28, 1848.

William B. McClellan prospered in these years, adding slaves to the household, who would have been a help to Juliet in providing for her family under circumstances that required imagination and ingenuity. Flour, to make bread and cakes, was difficult to obtain in the days of early settlement. Apparently determined to adapt to the new surroundings, Juliet “devised a way of making corn light-bread, a way handed down to many generations...who declare that bread made after her own instructions was well nigh perfect.” [388]

Another concern of Juliet McClellan was medical care when there were no doctors available. With a large family in a time of many illnesses, the concern is quite understandable, particularly considering the death of her youngest daughter, Rebecca. Somehow Juliet was able to obtain some medical texts, which she studied to learn about herbs and roots, items available to her on the frontier when medicines were not. “She took her children into the woods with her in order that they might help her in the work, and as they worked, she explained the value of each thing gathered. She concocted remedies for the stings of centerpedes (sic) and the bites of snakes, and said remedies were nearly always effective. She made a salve which physicians after said must be patented.” [389] Juliet’s medical knowledge was not restricted to just her family; she served as midwife to women in childbirth as well as doctor to others who were ill.

Western Washington County, Texas





In frontier areas it was normally the role of women to provide medical care. There were diseases “such as cholera, smallpox, diphtheria, and ague (malaria),” as well as childhood diseases like scarlet fever and measles. “Slippery-elm water was a common housewife’s remedy and many supplemented family medical lore with Dr. Gunn’s *The House Physician*,” which told how to care for the ill and how to make remedies from locally growing herbs.[\[390\]](#) This may have been one of the “medical books” about which Juliet’s granddaughter wrote.

Schooling in the rural areas of early Texas was usually provided by subscription schools, that is, one where parents got together to form a school with each family paying tuition to hire a teacher. The families usually built the school and hired the teacher, who frequently lived with the families of the students. Education in these country schools was basic that is, reading, writing and arithmetic. The curriculum, frequently taught by very young teachers, was suited for an environment in which these basic skills were all that was necessary or desired for most of the students. The school sessions were responsive to the needs of the farms where the majority of the students lived. Therefore, when the students were needed on the family farm to plant or harvest, the school did not meet. Thus school sessions might only last for three months at a time with students attending when not needed at home, and when their parents were able to pay the tuition. It is likely that the younger McClellan children attended such schools. Juliet Smith McClellan also “taught them at her knee the best she could giving them at the same time word pictures of ease and culture, and when the time was ripe, sent them to the Union Hill County School.” [\[391\]](#)

The community of Union Hill was said to have been located on the Yagua River, “about two miles northwest of... Burton.” [\[392\]](#) The Union Hill school that these younger McClellan children attended was a high school, chartered in 1858, and officially called “Union Hill High School”.[\[393\]](#) Washington County had a number of schools beyond the simple country schools that provided basic education. These schools, also private institutions, were founded by individuals in areas of sufficient population to support them. Since Washington County certainly qualified early regarding population, these schools were readily available to provide for education above the elementary level.. The students of such schools were sometimes boarding students, since the schools, unlike the country schools, were usually located in towns.

Other McClellan relatives moved to the area by 1851 when William B. McClellan’s younger half-brother, Bennett T. McClellan, his wife, Nancy, and their two young daughters, Louisa and Elinora, moved from Madison County, Tennessee, to join their McClellan relatives in Washington County. Bennett (B.T.) McClellan joined his half-brother in running the McClellan store as apparent by

the 1853 Washington County tax roll that showed the brothers (“McLellan”) taxed on \$1400 of merchandise on hand January 1, 1853. Around this time, B.T. McClellan’s wife, Nancy, died, and, on June 18, 1853, B.T. McClellan married his second wife, Alice McClausland. Alice was born in Ireland about 1834. To this marriage were eventually born three more McClellan children, James T., John and Florence.[\[394\]](#)

In 1854, eight years after settling in Washington County, William B. McClellan “petitioned the Grand Lodge of Texas...for a charter to organize a Masonic Lodge at ‘McClellan’s Store.’ Known as McClellan’s Lodge No. 159, the petition was granted in 1855.” [\[395\]](#) The early pioneer days behind them, inhabitants of the area welcomed other signs of civilization, such as the opening of the Union Hill High School, on the previously raw frontier.

The four eldest McClellan children, who had come to Texas as teenagers, began marrying in 1845, and for the next 15 years these four young families would come and go from Washington County. The eldest, John J. McClellan, and his wife, Susan, had moved to Navarro County in 1849. Navarro County tax records show that John served as an agent for his father’s 640 acres of land, which were later located in Ellis County after that county was created out of Navarro County. John also had 320 acres of land from his second class headright as a single man. One of John and Susan McClellan’s neighbors in Navarro County was Alabama born George W. Brown, 22, who might have been a relative of Susan’s. Nearby was Fort Graham, which had been established by the federal government as a defense against Indian raids.[\[396\]](#) By 1854 John and his family were back in Washington County, where they would remain.

Another McClellan child, Mattie, and her husband, Charles H. Dunn, first moved just north of Washington County to Burleson County where in 1850 Charles was teaching school. Charles and his family were in Navarro County by 1860 where he was farming and where there were two other Dunn families listing the same post office on the census.[\[397\]](#) Charles H. Dunn appears to have been a member of a Dunn family that originated in Ireland and immigrated to the lower coast of the South, probably first settling in South Carolina. Over the next couple of generations the Dunns had moved slowly across the Lower South, with successive children being born in more western states. Finally the families and their allied kin arrived in Texas. By this time the Dunns and their associated families were a dense web of interrelations and where Charles H. Dunn fits is unknown, although evidence points to some sort of relationship.[\[398\]](#)



During the 1850s, three of the older McClellan children lived at least part of the time in Washington County. John J. McClellan returned from Navarro County with his family. Janie Gilliland and her husband, Haynie, despite absences, spent most of the decade in Washington County. The third child, Susan McCain, younger sister to Janie, had married Abram McCain in 1848. Abram was the son of James J. McCain and his wife Sallie Allen McCain, who had early roots in the Washington County area.

James J. McCain, a native of Tennessee, had been 35 years old when he and his 27 year old wife arrived in Texas in December 1828 with their two children. [399] Listed as one of Stephen F. Austin's colonists, James J. McCain received land in the Washington County area. When James McCain later died, his widow, Sallie, married a second time to Benjamin Babbitt by whom she had three more sons.

The McCains' son, Abram McCain, served in the Mexican War, which had followed Texas' annexation to the United States. He was shot and wounded so severely that he never completely recovered from the effects of the wounds. He was sufficiently recovered three years later, however, to marry Susan McClellan in Washington County.

By 1850 the second husband of Abram's mother, Sallie Allen McCain Babbitt, was also dead and Sallie was the head of her household. Close by Sallie Babbitt lived her son and daughter-in-law, Abram and Susan McCain.

Meanwhile during this decade the younger McClellan children were growing up. The fifth child, Albert G. McClellan, wed May 29, 1856 in Washington County to Amanda C. Thomson. [400] A few years later Albert's next younger brother, Samuel H. McClellan, married Adeline "Addie" Hackworth, the daughter of Tennessee born W.

W. Hackworth and his Illinois born wife, Eliza J. Hackworth, old Washington County settlers. Addie's father was a wheelwright, that is a person who repaired wheels, wagon wheels, buggy wheels or whatever. Wheelwrights also make wheels and are sometimes listed on census records as mechanics. Addie was the oldest daughter in a family of about

eight children. Her younger brother, John, was tax assessor and collector for of Brenham, the county seat of Washington County. In 1871, Mary M. Hackworth, Addie's younger sister, married Addie's nephew-in-law, William J. McClellan. William J. McClellan was the eldest child of William B. and Juliet's son, John J. McClellan.

Yet the 1850s were not all marriages, growing families and increasing prosperity for the McClellans. William B. and Juliet's son, Thomas Benton McClellan, died sometime during the decade. While the death of a child was a more common event than today, the death of another of their children was probably no easier for his parents to bear. For the McClellans, however, the worst was yet to come.

[374] White, Gifford. *1840 Citizens of Texas, Volume 3: Land Grants*, p. 178. On applications for headrights, immigrants had to put when they arrived in Texas. William B. McClellan and his oldest son, John J. McClellan, both put December 1841.

[375] The material was gathered for inclusion in a book written by Annie Doom Pickrell, entitled *Pioneer Women in Texas*, (1939) 1991, which is still in print. A copy of the material is in the possession of the author.

[376] Ibid.

[377] From letter written by McClellan descendant, Judge John McClellan Marshall of Dallas, Texas, dated January 31, 1991: "...and in my dining room is a hunt chest brought to Texas by William Beavers McClellan (as far as anyone knows)."

[378] *Memorial and Biographical history of Dallas County, Texas*, p. 176–177. This article states that Old Franklin was the county seat of Robertson. In 1841, however, Old Franklin was in Milam County. Today Franklin, Texas is the county seat of a much smaller Robertson County.

[379] There was another William B. McClellan, a printer, in the area at the same time, but his Land Office records show that he arrived in Texas in 1840 and his third class headright was out of Bastrop, Fayette County. He sold his certificate in 1845 to Albert S. Nail who claimed the land in the Milam District in 1847.

[380] Samuels, Nancy Timmons and Barbara Roach Knox, *Old Northwest Texas*, p. 505. As a single man, John J. McClellan would have been entitled to 320 acres; perhaps he had sold off seven acres by 1849, leaving 313 acres.

[381] Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 442.

[382] Papers of D. T. Gilliland; copy in possession of author.

[383] Avis, Annie Maul Knittel, *History of Burton*, 1974, p. 42.

[384] From copy in possession of author of information gathered for Pickrell book.

[385] Ibid.

[386] Susan J. Brown, who was born in Alabama, may have been the daughter of John Brown, born in Alabama in about 1808. He is on the 1860 Washington County Federal Census (242/242) with two sons, John and David. A John Brown was a member of Austin's first "Three Hundred" colonists. A John M. Brown was the senior member of a firm of merchants at Washington-on-the-Brazos. (Ray, Worth S., *Austin Colony Pioneers, including History of Bastrop, Fayette, Grimes, Montgomery and Washington Counties, Texas and Their Earliest Settlers*, 1949, p. 67).

[387] Some of Janie McClellan Gilliland's descendants have said that her first name was Sarah, which while certainly possible, is not likely. It appears that Janie was named for her Smith grandmother, Rhoda Ingles Smith. The name, Rhoda Jane, appears among her granddaughters and later descendants, although there is no record of Rhoda Ingles' middle name. These families usually named their children family names and oldest daughters were commonly named for their maternal grandmothers. Also, there are no known Sarahs in either the Smith or McClellan families. Janie McClellan was always called Janie and her early death might have prevented her full name from being correctly remembered. One son, who said her name was Sarah Jane, was only two years old when she died.

[388] From copy in possession of author of information gathered for Pickrell book.

[389] Ibid.

[390] Smith, Page. *The Nation Comes of Age (A People's History of the Ante-Bellum Years)*, vol. 4, New York: Penguin Books, 1981, p. 867.

[391] Ibid.

[392] *Extinct towns of Washington County, Texas*, p. 53.

[393] *Ibid.*

[394] 1850 Federal Census for Washington County, Texas, p. 287, no. 49; 1860 Federal Census for Washington County, Texas, p. 41, no. 249, Federal Census for Washington County, Texas, p. 116, no. 518.

[395] Avis, *History of Burton*, p. 42.

[396] 1850 Federal Census for Navarro County, Texas, p. 110, line 20, October 8, 1850

[\[397\]](#) These two families were M. A. Dunn and P. R. Dunn, both listing the Corsicana post office.

[398] Charles H. Dunn was very likely a brother to an Alexander Dunn, born in Alabama about 1831, who was living with the Frank McMillan family in Limestone County in 1850. The McMillans were an allied family of the Dunns. Charles and Mattie named their second son Alexander. An "A. Dunn", probably Alexander, was living in Navarro County in 1860 (Samuels, *Old Northwest Texas*, v. I-A, p. 4; v. I-B, p. 416); see also *Brazos County History: Rich Past-Bright Future*, 1986, for history of family of James Dunn, Sr. born in Ireland about 1793.

[399] Williams, Villamae, ed. *Stephen F. Austin's Register of Families*, from the originals in the General Land Office, Austin, Texas, 1984, p. 289.

[400] “Thomson” is a relatively uncommon spelling, but who Amanda’s parents were is unknown. Thomson was the surname of Robertson County surveyor, Austin and Robertson colonist, Alexander Thomson. Unfortunately, misspelling was common in records of this time, and if there was ever a name easy to misspell it would be this one. Amanda’s surname could easily be Thompson or Thomason instead of the “Thomson” of the marriage record. Surveyor Alexander Thomson, however, was a brother of Lucy Thomson Webb, wife of Hugh Kerr of Washington County. The Webbs were the in-laws of John S. Jones according to Jones’ letters. Lucy and Hugh Kerr had a daughter, Amanda Jane, who married minister Homer S. Thrall. If “Amanda” was a family name, Amanda C. Thomson, could have been Alexander Thomson’s daughter, and a niece of Lucy Kerr.

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