

McCOMBS CEMETERY

FLOWER MOUND, TEXAS

Historical Narrative researched and written by Kathleen S. Adler, PhD. for Texas Historical Commission (THC) Subject Marker Application, Denton County. (1997)

**NARRATIVE HISTORY OF McCOMBS CEMETERY
SUBMITTED FOR
OFFICIAL TEXAS HISTORICAL MARKER
CONSIDERATION**

The McCombs Cemetery dedicated perhaps as early as 1855--one year before Denton was selected as county seat¹--is among the oldest² in Denton County. The individuals interred are early settlers who are highly representative of the pioneer history of Denton County. Groups of rugged individuals made their way in ox-drawn wagons from Tennessee to Texas and settled on adjoining land for protection from Indians and marauders. Some infants and young men and women died from the elements and likely disease. There were early widows who buried their loved ones on farmland, gave birth to first generation Texans and remained to work the land far from the life they had known.

The McCombs Cemetery is a reminder of the pioneers who participated in the settlement initially of Lewisville-Flower Mound, an economic crossroads encroaching upon the cemetery today. Moreover, their several hundred direct descendants,³ by making significant contributions and careers in fields of agriculture, banking, education, government, law and law enforcement, industry, research and medicine, in turn led in the development of Denton and surrounding areas. Indeed, the McCombs Cemetery "holds clues to the beginnings of civilization north of Dallas."⁴ The following is a narrative history of the McCombs Cemetery.

In 1855 after a seven-month trek, Nehemiah Wade Boyd (1823-1856), wife Susan McCombs Boyd (1824-1917), their six children, Susan's widowed mother Mary Nowlin McCombs (1803-1867)⁵ and various

members of the Nowlin, Sigler and Rivers families of Chattanooga Tennessee settled in Denton County near Round Grove community in an area which eventually became Lewisville-Flower Mound.⁶

According to family history, Nehemiah Wade Boyd was in the process of building a log house in 1856 for his family south of Timber Creek on what used to be known as Boyd's Hill⁷ when he was chilled by a blue norther. He subsequently died of pneumonia and left behind his large family and a child on the way, George Taylor Boyd (1856-1933). The story of this settlement, his untimely death and the perseverance of his widow who outlived him by sixty-two years was presented in Denton Texas by the Texana Living History Association on County Seat Saturday, September 14, 1996.⁸ Susan, incidentally was recognized as the oldest resident of Denton County shortly before her death.⁹

Nehemiah Wade Boyd's burial in land donated by a neighboring McCombs relative was thought to be the first in what has since been called McCombs Cemetery,¹⁰ until descendants of George Taylor Boyd unearthed a headstone bearing the date 1855 and initial J during renovation of the cemetery property July 6, 1996. Land for the cemetery is believed to have been donated by John Mathis McCombs (1825-1864), one of Susan's brothers. Deed research conducted in 1990 by Joyce Hardin Cavett, a descendant of John Mathis McCombs, revealed records of purchases of adjacent land by John Mathis McCombs in 1854 and Nehemiah Wade Boyd and Mary Nowlin McCombs, separately in 1856.¹¹

The cemetery, located on unpaved Wager Road off of Bellaire Boulevard and Garden Ridge Road in Flower Mound, served as burial ground until the late 1800s, primarily for members of McCombs and Sigler families. For example, there are markers for Sarah Sigler (- 1873), Winnie Sigler (1833 -) and David Jackson McCombs (1838-1874). Typically, bodies were entombed with native sandstone rocks and "bricks . . . made by a technology prevalent ca. 1870-1890."¹² Mary Nowlin McCombs was buried under cover of darkness in an unmarked and camouflaged grave to avoid detection by Indians.¹³ By contrast, Civil War patriot¹⁴ David Jackson McCombs was given a masonic headstone.¹⁵

Evidence suggests the cemetery may have been used by the community at large and for a longer period of time. For instance, some recovered stones bear initials E.M.T. and M.L.E. (the latter also discovered July 6, 1996) which do not correspond to family names Boyd, McCombs, Nowlin, Sigler and Rivers. A marker for an infant (1875) also exists. According to archaeologists Bob D. Skiles of Nacogdoches Texas and David H. Journey of Waxahachie Texas, "[a]lthough several families used this cemetery, it should be classified as a community cemetery, used from the 1850s to the 1890s"¹⁶ Additionally, Skiles and Journey conservatively estimated that one hundred individuals could be buried in the 0.425 acre cemetery.¹⁷ To date, only about thirteen markers¹⁸ have been recovered or documented since roaming cattle in the 1970s, vandals in the late 1980s¹⁹ and a bulldozer in February 1993²⁰ destroyed much of the artifacts.

Restoring and protecting the cemetery has been a decades-long dream of Mollie Bernice Boyd Mitchell, great-granddaughter of Susan McCombs Boyd and Nehemiah Wade Boyd. Bernice's earliest recollections are of the funeral of Susan who was interred at Flower Mound Cemetery in 1917 and of her wondering why Susan and Nehemiah were not buried beside each other. Bernice persisted with questions and learned from her father Dixie Boyd (1886-1980), eldest son of George Taylor Boyd and Mollie A. Lott (1866-1900), that Nehemiah had been buried on farmland of a neighboring brother-in-law.²¹ Later, this contention was supported by research of Joyce Cavett. Of course, at the time of Nehemiah's death there were few actual cemeteries, and ". . . many early settlers were buried on allotted plots on relatives [sic] or neighbors [sic] farms."²² Susan's death occurred some decades after the McCombs Cemetery ceased to be used and when Flower Mound Cemetery was well established.

Bernice's efforts to find and preserve the cemetery were frustrated for years. The cemetery was "lost to [her father's] generation when fences were built around those farms as settlers came into the County"²³ and property encompassing the cemetery was sold a number of times to non-family. Deed records which might have identified and protected the cemetery presumably were lost when the Denton County courthouse burned in 1875 allegedly due to the Sam Bass outlaws.²⁴

Long-time Lewisville resident Stella Brooks Hyder (1883-1975) pointed out the area to Bernice in the early 1970s, but both were blocked from gaining access to the area by the landowner. Sulton

J. Boyd (1905-1980) and wife Elena B. Boyd (1913-1973) took Bernice to the cemetery and located a number of headstones including the commercial marker Sulton and his father George Taylor Boyd had set for Nehemiah Wade Boyd with financial assistance from Dixie Boyd and his cousin Jeff Boyd (1898-1968). When desecration of the cemetery was apparent due to the destructive nature of grazing cattle, Bernice asked permission to fence the area. The owner refused.²⁵ After the vandalism in the late 1980s, Bernice was able to marshal the legal talents of Dan S. Boyd and Randall S. Boyd, great-great-grandsons of Susan and Nehemiah Boyd.²⁶

The Boyds learned from thorough study of Texas law that no one can own land which has been dedicated as a cemetery. Further, "dedication" does not imply necessarily the existence of court records, rather human burial must be involved. Hence, "prior 'owners' of the property who attempted to deny access to [Boyd] family members appear to have been acting beyond their rights."²⁷ The McCombs Cemetery Association was established in 1990²⁸ by the Boyds who made plans to protect and restore the cemetery.

Before actions could be taken by the Association, individuals bulldozed the area in 1993 in preparation for a house. Incidentally, the only visible marker left after the destruction was that of the 1875 infant.²⁹ The McCombs Cemetery Association immediately brought a lawsuit against these persons.³⁰ Essentially, the Association was required to prove existence of the cemetery with aid of archaeologists. The lawsuit was settled in December 1993 with an agreement³¹ in which the McCombs Cemetery Association was

designated manager of the cemetery which was concurrently officially recognized as "[b]eing a 0.425 acre tract of land situated in the M. J. Owen Survey, Abstract Number 981, Denton County, Texas and being a part of a called 2.394 acre tract of land as described in a deed recorded in Volume 678, Page 296 of the Deed Records of Denton County, Texas" ³² The referenced deed is a quitclaim deed from the defendants, filed on behalf of the McCombs Cemetery Association. ³³

In sharp contrast to the people who displayed such disregard for the cemetery, there were individuals who demonstrated great concern. For instance, when installation of a windshear detection device near the McCombs Cemetery was being considered at the U. S. Department of Aviation in 1991, resident Mrs. Waters "alerted the officials to the fact that there was a cemetery in the area and that it should not be disturbed." ³⁴ Her quick action lead to an archaeological investigation of the cemetery by Bob Skiles for the federal government; he subsequently volunteered his services to the McCombs Cemetery Association during the 1993 lawsuit. ³⁵ Also important to recognize is resident Jeff Ferguson ³⁶ who went twice to Flower Mound City Hall to stop the bulldozing. Officials reported they could find no record of a cemetery. Eventually through the power of networking, the cemetery was linked to the Boyd family in Denton. ³⁷

Ironically, publicity from the destruction enabled distant cousins in Borger and Andrews Texas and Cheyenne Oklahoma to end finally their search for the burial site of their ancestors. ³⁸

Donations were made with gratitude to the McCombs Cemetery Association to help proceed with restoration and fencing of the site.

A cedar rail fence is being erected, primarily through the efforts of Douglass Whitcombe Boyd, great-great-grandson of Susan and Nehemiah Wade Boyd, and his friend Mark Jones, chief probation officer of Denton County. In preparation for the fence, the area was cleared of brush and brambles by sixteen probationers making community service restitution through the Denton County Probation Department.³⁹ Trenches made by the archaeologists in 1993 were backfilled July 6, 1996 at which time the M.L.E. and 1855 markers mentioned earlier were discovered.

On September 3, 1996 Bernice set a marker at McCombs Cemetery to remember all known to be buried there⁴⁰ since so few stones are left intact. Consideration is being given to restoration or preservation and presentation of the broken stones, however.

As work to fence the 141 year old McCombs Cemetery nears completion, the McCombs Cemetery Association seeks an Official Texas Historical Marker to help identify the cemetery for individuals still searching for ancestral burial grounds, to commemorate a site where north Texas civilization began and to recognize and honor efforts of pioneers and descendants who helped transform wilderness into a thriving center of commerce.

Compiled November 27, 1996 by Kathleen Stapler Adler, PhD., great-great-granddaughter of Susan McCombs and Nehemiah Wade Boyd.
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**NARRATIVE HISTORY OF McCOMBS CEMETERY
ATTACHMENT***

WE HONOR THOSE KNOWN TO BE BURIED
IN MCCOMBS CEMETERY
AS WELL AS THOSE
KNOWN BUT TO GOD

J	(-1855)
Nehemiah Wade Boyd	(1823-1856)	
Mary Nowlin McCombs	(1803-1867)	
McCombs matriarch		
Winnie Sigler	(1833-)
Sarah Sigler	(-1873)
David Jackson McCombs	(1838-1874)	
Confederate patriot, Freemason		
Infant	(1875)	
J. D. McCombs		
D. B. S.		
L. A. S.		
E. M. T.		
M. L. E.		
J. McCombs		
Mary E. Sigler		
C[e]lestia (Callie) Wade McCombs	(1852-1879)**	

* Inscription of memorial marker set at McCombs Cemetery, September 3, 1996.

** Considered to have been buried in McCombs Cemetery close to other family members.

ENDNOTES

1. Bullitt Lowry, ed., The Historical Markers of Denton County, Texas (Denton: Terrill Wheeler Printing Inc., 1980), p. 8.

2. The Medlin Cemetery, dedicated in 1850, is reported to be "one of the oldest cemeteries in Denton County." Ibid., p. 12.

3. Most notable among these individuals are the following.

Dixie Boyd (1886-1980) beginning in 1930 was business manager, comptroller and treasurer at North Texas State Teachers College (known later as North Texas State University and currently as the University of North Texas). See "First in 65 Years: Three Survivors of 1904 LHS Graduating Class Hold Reunion," Lewisville Leader, [26] October 1969.

His son, Dickson Knight Boyd, M.D. (1924-1987) was a general practitioner in Denton who "delivered over 2,000 babies without losing a mother." See Dickson Knight Boyd, M.D., Denton "To all my patients," 30 November 1979.

Dick's sister Mollie Bernice Boyd Mitchell dedicated forty-six and one-half years of service to four generations of customers of Denton County National Bank (currently Bank One) beginning in 1930. She was the first woman bank clerk and later the first woman vice president of a Denton bank. For an account prior to her retirement, see John W. Moody, "First Lady Banker Deposits 45 Years," The Denton Record-Chronicle, 4 June 1975; and Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Denton, to Kathleen Stapler Adler, Plano, 13 August 1996, Transcript in the hand of Bernice Boyd Mitchell.

Her son Joe Mitchell in 1969 "established the first personnel office in NTSU's history." For direct quote, see "Mitchell Ninth To Ask Election on City Council," The Denton Record-Chronicle, 16 February 1975. See also Keith Shelton, "Denton Area News of the Week in Review," The Denton Record-Chronicle, 9 February 1969.

Joe also served as Denton city councilman, Mayor Pro Tem and Mayor between 1975 and 1979. See 1988 Historical Calendar: Mayors of Denton (Denton, Tex.: By Friends of the Denton Public Library, 1988).

John Greenleaf Boyd (1846-1933), as a lawman, pursued criminal Sam Bass. See J. Frank Dobie, Tales of Old-Time Texas (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1956), pp. 85-86; Dan S. Boyd, "Commentary on Boyd Family Photographs," Denton County Courthouse Museum, Denton Texas, [1987]; and Nita Thurman, "Family to restore cemetery: Landowners turn over bulldozed site to pioneers' kin," The Dallas Morning News, 16 June 1993.

He was also justice of the peace in the 1920s. See Ed. F. Bates, History and Reminiscences of Denton County (Denton: McNitzky Printing Company, 1918; reprint, Denton: Terrill Wheeler Printing, Inc., 1976), p. 35 (page reference is to reprint edition).

Fred H. Minor (1888-1975) was speaker of the Texas House from 1927-1928.

Ben W. Boyd (1894-1964) was district and appellate court judge between 1929 and 1963.

Will C. Boyd, Jr. was state district judge between 1964 and 1984.

For documentation on these last three individuals, see Dan S. Boyd, "Commentary on Boyd Family Photographs," Denton County Courthouse Museum, Denton Texas, [1987].

Linda Truitt Creagh-Dexter, Director of Ink Development and Chemistry at Spectra, Inc. (acquired by Markem Corporation June 1996) was awarded in 1967 the first ever PhD from the University of North Texas (and coincidentally the first PhD from the chemistry department). See University of North Texas Alumni Appreciation Day Luncheon Program Honoring Outstanding Alumni for Excellence in their Profession, Office of Development, April 15, 1994.

4. Karen Patrick, "Brothers work to preserve cemetery: Burial ground holds piece of FM history," Lewisville News, 18 June 1993.

5. William McCombs (1800-1851) and Mary Nowlin McCombs were married August 25, 1822. He died in Hamilton County Tennessee in 1851. See genealogy research of Elaine Boyd Truitt; and Willie Wilks Simmons, Lewisville, to Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Denton, "The History of the McCombs Family: Related by Wilfred Wesley McCombs" of Duncan, (enclosure), [prior to 1986].

6. Barbara Fisher, ed., Friends of the Courthouse (Denton, Tex.: By friends of the courthouse, P. O. Box 3084, November 1987), "Boyd Family," by Bernice Boyd Mitchell with genealogy researched by Elaine Boyd Truitt.

7. Boyd's Hill was leveled and the dirt was used along I35E between Corporate Drive and Vista Ridge Mall in 1980-1981. Earl Cook, retired Chief Inspector, Texas Department of Transportation, Denton Texas, Telephone interview by Bernice Boyd Mitchell, 22 November 1996.

8. LaJuanna Faught as Susan Boyd McCombs, in A Woman of Texas, by Nita Thurman, Texana Living History Association, Denton Texas, 14 September 1996. See also "Past Events," Texana Living History Newsletter, October 1996, p. 7.

9. See "Mrs. Susan Boyd Claims Honor of Being the Oldest Woman in Denton County; 93 Years," The Denton Record-Chronicle, 24 February 1917.

10. Nita Thurman, "Family to restore cemetery: Landowners turn over bulldozed site to pioneers' kin," The Dallas Morning News, 16 June 1993; Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Boyd family history notes, 17 May 1986, pp. 1-2; and Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Interview by Kathleen Stapler Adler, Denton Texas, 18 July 1996.

11. Denton County deed records, microfilm reel 1302327, vol. O, pp. 417-418, 423-424, microfilm reel 1302328, vol. P, pp. 6-7.

12. McCombs Cemetery Association, et al. v. Jackson, et ux, Cause No. 93-30076-211, 211th Judicial District Court, Denton County, Texas (1993), Exhibit A, page two of five, 2 July 1993.

13. Diana Gorsuch, "Pioneer graves marred by vandals," Lewisville News, 15 May 1988; and Willie Wilks Simmons, Lewisville, to Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Denton, "The History of the McCombs Family: Related by Wilfred Wesley McCombs" of Duncan, (enclosure), [prior to 1986].

14. On 8 February 1862 in Denton County, David Jackson McCombs at age 23 enlisted with newly formed Company G, 18th Texas Cavalry, CSA. See Texas Confederate Military Service Records, Compiled from Muster Rolls in the Texas State Archives, (Austin, Texas: Texas State Library, 1994), Reel 5, Section 3.

For a mention of other Denton County pioneers who enlisted under Captain Felix McKittrick, see E. Dale Odom, An Illustrated History of Denton County, Texas: From Peters Colony to Metroplex, (Denton, Tex: By E. Dale Odom, 420 Headlee, 1996), p. 24.

15. Joyce Hardin Cavett, Andrews, to Kathleen Stapler Adler, Plano, 6 September 1996; and Jodean McGuffin Martin, Altus, to Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Denton, 20 June [1990].

16. McCombs Cemetery Association, et al. v. Jackson, et ux, Cause No. 93-30076-211, 211th Judicial District Court, Denton County, Texas (1993), Exhibit A, page four of five, 2 July 1993.

17. Ibid., page three of five.

18. See Attachment. The body of C[e]lestia (Callie) Wade McCombs (1852-1879) likely would have been buried close to family members whose graves were found in McCombs Cemetery, according to

her great-granddaughter Nelda Fae Boswell Davis of Cheyenne Oklahoma. See Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Denton, to Kathleen Stapler Adler, Plano, 20 July 1996, Transcript in the hand of Bernice Boyd Mitchell.

19. Diana Gorsuch, Lewisville News, 15 May 1988.

20. Nita Thurman, The Dallas Morning News, 16 June 1993.

21. Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Boyd family history notes, 17 May 1986, p. 2; and Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Interview by Kathleen Stapler Adler, Denton Texas, 18 July 1996.

22. Elwood Ross, ed., Sweet Flower Mound Land (Wolfe City, Tex.: Henington Publishing Company for the Flower Mound Historical Commission, 1995), p. 294.

23. Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Denton, to Kathleen Stapler Adler, Plano, 19 July 1996, Transcript in the hand of Bernice Boyd Mitchell.

24. Bullitt Lowry, pp. 38-39.

25. Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Denton, to Kathleen Stapler Adler, Plano, 20 July 1996, Transcript in the hand of Bernice Boyd Mitchell; and Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Boyd family history notes, 17 May 1986, pp. 2-3.

26. Karen Patrick, Lewisville News, 18 June 1993.

27. Dan S. Boyd, Dallas, to Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Denton, Joe Mitchell, Lewisville, Terry Randall Boyd, Grapevine, James W. Boyd, Lewisville, 30 May 1990; and Thurman, The Dallas Morning News, 16 June 1993.

28. Randall S. Boyd, Denton, to Secretary of State, Corporation Division, Austin, 23 August 1990.

29. Thurman, The Dallas Morning News, 16 June 1993.

30. McCombs Cemetery Association, et al. v. Jackson, et ux, Cause No. 93-30076-211, 211th Judicial District Court, Denton County, Texas (1993).

31. McCombs Cemetery Association, et al. v. Jackson, et ux, Cause No. 93-30076-211, 211th Judicial District Court, Denton County, Texas (1993), Agreed Order, 17 December 1993.

32. McCombs Cemetery Association, et al. v. Jackson, et ux, Cause No. 93-30076-211, 211th Judicial District Court, Denton County, Texas (1993), Exhibit A, page one and three of five, 2 July 1993.

33. R. M. Clark, Dallas, to Dan S. Boyd, Dallas, 22 July 1993; and Dan S. Boyd, Dallas, to W. C. Boyd, Jr., Cherryfield, Randall S. Boyd, Denton, Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Denton, 27 December 1993.

34. Dan S. Boyd, Dallas, to Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Denton, Joe Mitchell, Lewisville, Terry Randall Boyd, Grapevine, Randall S. Boyd, Denton, W. C. Boyd, Jr., Cherryfield, 19 March 1993. See also Thurman, The Dallas Morning News, 16 June 1993.

35. Perhaps it should be emphasized that the archaeological facts cited in this narrative are derived from the work of Skiles.

36. Dan S. Boyd, Dallas, to Jeff Ferguson, Flower Mound, 17 August 1993; and Nita Thurman, The Dallas Morning News, 16 June 1993.

37. Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Interview by Kathleen Stapler Adler, Denton Texas, 18 July 1996.

38. Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Denton, to Kathleen Stapler Adler, Plano, 20 July 1996, Transcript in the hand of Bernice Boyd Mitchell; and Bernice Boyd Mitchell, Interview by Kathleen Stapler Adler, Denton Texas, 18 July 1996.

39. Mark Jones, Denton County Probation Department, Denton Texas, Telephone interview by Kathleen Stapler Adler, 19 August 1996.

40. See Attachment.

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