

# ROBERT MOUNTS HOUSE

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Denton County*

## **I. CONTEXT**

The Robert Mounts House at 305 Mounts Avenue in Denton, Texas, represents the embodiment of influence that the Mounts family had on the development of ranching, business, education, and religion in Denton, Texas, and to the development of the town itself from its establishment as the county seat in 1857. The relationship of the house to these endeavors continued even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century as Robert Mounts moved to Hereford, Texas, to become an important cattleman, and the Robert Mounts House became the long-time manse for the Presbyterian Church in Denton.

The Robert Mounts House is situated at the northwest corner of Mounts Avenue and Gregg Street, and its recorded history originates with the first instrument of conveyance of the land in 1839, from the Republic of Texas to William Neill for receipt of 640 acres of land<sup>1</sup> as payment for services in the Texas-Mexican War of 1836<sup>2</sup>. Robert W. Woodruff acquired 100½ acres from this original 640 acre Neill tract in 1855<sup>3</sup>. In the fall of 1856, it was decided to relocate the county seat of Denton County to a tract of land donated by Mr. Woodruff, William Loving, and Hiram Sisco in order to obtain a more centralized location. The town was to be called Denton, after John B. Denton<sup>4</sup>. Among the first businessmen to leave the former county seat of New Alton and move his business to one of the new town lots in Denton was Robert Mounts' father, W. H. Mounts<sup>5</sup>.

Upon the death of Robert Woodruff, the remainder of his land was divided into lots and sold in December of 1858. One of these lots, Lot 14, was purchased by Joseph Bledsoe<sup>6</sup>. The majority of this land of Lot 14 would soon become the Mounts' family farm and homestead, and would later be divided further into city lots in the Mounts Addition and the Mounts 2<sup>nd</sup> Addition, the latter in which the Robert Mounts House is located.

For a decade after its founding, Denton County was on the northeast Texas frontier. Cattle and horses ranged on the unfenced prairies. Residents were engaged in ranching and subsistence farming. Various members of the Mounts family were involved in ranching in the early days of Denton County. W. H. Mounts had a stable and was known to have fine horses<sup>7</sup>. Robert Mounts lived and worked on the famous Gregg Ranch northwest of town and became a highly successful cattleman.

As surveys were granted and lots were divided, farms and ranches began to dot the landscape in the land surrounding the new county seat of Denton. Cabins and farmhouses were built to house the residents of the new town of Denton early on. After purchasing Lot 14, Joseph Bledsoe built a house on this land<sup>8</sup> sometime between 1859 and 1860. He is noted as a resident of Collin County when he sold the property to Emily Noble Mounts (1811 - late-1860s), Robert Mounts' grandmother, on March 23, 1861<sup>9</sup>.

The Mounts family was important in the early commerce of the developing town of Denton. Denton grew from a frontier town, incorporating as a City in 1866. The first railroad, Texas & Pacific Railway, came to Denton in 1881, linking Denton to major cities, promoting Denton's role as an agricultural trade center<sup>10</sup>. Farms and ranches became profitable and merchandisers and bankers advanced the business community. Denton's Courthouse square became a focal point for business. In addition to W. H. Mounts' early mercantile establishment

on the square, Robert Mounts' mother bought a mill just north of the square in 1865<sup>11</sup>. W. H. Mounts' business ventures continued through at least the 1860s and 1870s and were nationwide in scope<sup>12</sup>.

W. H. Mounts served during the Civil War from 1863 to at least March of 1864 in Co. D, McCord's Frontier Regiment Texas Cavalry<sup>13</sup>. He entered as a Private and later served as a hospital Steward<sup>14</sup>.

Fraternal organizations were the social networking equivalent of the mid-1800s. In 1861, The Royal Arch Masons No. 80 was organized, and W. H. Mounts and W. C. Baines were charter members. W.H. Mounts joined the IOOF No. 82, originally formed in 1859, after the group's reorganization in 1866<sup>15</sup>. In January, 1869, he was installed as an officer of this organization<sup>16</sup>.

The Mounts family was very influential in the establishment of religious worship and education in Denton. Robert Mounts' mother, Mattie Mounts, was a charter member of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and his grandfather, Rev. John Haynes, was one of its original pastors<sup>17</sup>. Mrs. Mounts later established the first Sunday School in Denton which was multi-denominational<sup>18</sup>. Mattie Mounts also taught private school in her home and on South Elm Street, and Robert Mounts' sisters, Sena and Alice Mounts, were among Denton's early public school teachers.

Prime Denton residential real estate in the 1870s began close to the Square, filling present day Elm and Locust Streets north and south with early pioneer families. At that time, West Oak Street was a dusty road linking Denton to Decatur. It would soon become Denton's preferred residential area with the construction of several fine homes by leading Denton citizens. Dr. Curvier Lipscomb purchased the first lot in 1874 from William H. Mounts, building a family

home at present day 802 West Oak Street (now demolished)<sup>19</sup>. In 1883, Jessie and Addison Graham, early Denton merchants, built a home in High Victorian Style, dubbed the 'house of seven gables' at present day 700 West Oak Street (now demolished). In 1886, Annie and Robert C. Scripture, merchants at the Scripture building on the Denton Square, built their home at present day 819 West Oak Street. The Raley family built their home at present day 801 West Oak Street in 1895. Priestly Lipscomb, Dr. Lipscomb's son, built a home for his bride at present day 918 West Oak Street in 1895. Otis Graham built the Queen Anne style home at present day 723 West Oak Street in 1898<sup>20</sup>.

Also in 1898, Robert Mounts and his wife, Nannie Lee Christal, bought the lot on Mounts Avenue from Dr. Lipscomb's son, Cuvier Lipscomb, Jr.<sup>21</sup>, and built the Robert Mounts House<sup>22</sup>. That same year, Robert Mounts' mother, Mattie Mounts, built a mirror-image twin house on the adjacent lot north<sup>23</sup> known today as the Mounts-Wright House. Since that time, the Robert Mounts House has had many owners, most notably the Central Presbyterian Church. This church evolved from the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the first organization to build a church house in Denton, and used the Robert Mounts House as the manse for their ministers from 1919 to 1943<sup>24</sup>.

In 1988, Brian and Vicki Morrison purchased the Robert Mounts House. In restoration, it has been discovered that the improvement of an additional wing was added to the house sometime prior to 1930. This was likely added by the church to provide office space for their ministers<sup>25</sup>. The Robert Mounts House was featured in the book, *Manners of the Manse* by Nannie Morris Estes<sup>26</sup>, about the life and times of the Rev. Charles W. Estes who lived in the house. Chapter twelve of the book is devoted to his family's time in Denton and the Robert

Mounts House. In 1991, the Robert Mounts House became a recognized Denton Historic Landmark and was annexed into the Oak-Hickory Historic District.

## **II. OVERVIEW**

The Mounts family has been traced back to 1800 in Fredrick County, Virginia. Genealogy records indicate that the Mounts family is of French descent<sup>27</sup>. Providence Mounts married Emily Z. J. W. Noble on May 7, 1822. They resided in Virginia where their third child, William Harry Mounts, was born on April 2, 1833. Sometime after 1850, presumably after the death of her husband, Emily Mounts and her family moved to Denton County, Texas<sup>28</sup>. Robert Noble Mounts (1863 - 1922) was the first child of W. H. Mounts and the grandson of Emily Noble Mounts.

The Republic of Texas' Secretary of War, A. Sidney Johnston, issued certificate #9324 on November 30, 1839, as a land grant to William Neill in the future region of Denton, Texas<sup>29</sup>. The William Neill Survey of 100 ½ acres came out of this grant<sup>30</sup>, and the land on which the Robert Mounts House sits came out of this original survey. Like many deed descriptions in those days, it was platted out referencing blackjack and post oak trees as well as “a pile of stones from which a double elm [grows]” along the lines of surrounding surveys<sup>31</sup>. William Woodruff had acquired this portion of the Neill survey in 1855<sup>32</sup>.

Also around this time, general dissatisfaction had grown with the present location of the county seat at New Alton. The water situation had been poor from the beginning, and many citizens wanted a location nearer to the center of the county. An election was held on the first Tuesday of November, 1856, to decide the location of the new county seat, and it was decided that the town would be located on a tract of 100 acres donated by Mr. Woodruff (20 acres),

William Loving (40 acres), and Hiram Sisco (40 acres)<sup>33</sup>. William Woodruff, one of the town site donors, was said to be one of the surveyors of this original platting<sup>34</sup>.

In 1858, to settle her husband's debts at his death, William Woodruff's widow, Louisa E. Woodruff, subdivided his remaining acreage, about 75 acres, into 14 lots. Lot 14 of 18.9 acres was purchased by auction "at the Court House door" on December 7, 1858, by Joseph Bledsoe (1827 - c.1906)<sup>35</sup>. He built a house on this land between 1859 and 1860<sup>36</sup>. Bledsoe hailed from Kentucky and Missouri and was schooled as an attorney. Before establishing his practice, he accepted a position as chief engineer of the Texan Emigration and Land Company in which he spent a year surveying the Peters Colony beyond the frontier on the upper Brazos River. Bledsoe moved to Austin to practice law where he married Miranda Sneed, the daughter of Judge Sebron Graham Sneed, in 1857. In 1858, he brought his practice to Denton and became a leader of the secession movement. He moved to McKinney in 1860 prior to the outbreak of the Civil War<sup>37</sup>. Mr. Bledsoe sold the house and property on March 23, 1861, to Emily Noble Mounts<sup>38</sup>. This house faced south toward what is today Oak Street and appears on the 1883 "Birds Eye View of Denton" map drawn by Augustus Koch<sup>39</sup>. The road leading north off of Oak Street to this house later became Mounts Avenue<sup>40</sup>.

Robert Mounts' father, W. H. Mounts, and others associated with him, were instrumental in helping to establish and advance the business and government of early Denton. For about six years prior to 1857 the county seat of Denton was at New Alton<sup>41</sup>, where W. H. Mounts operated a store which sold general merchandise. In the new county seat of Denton, the first city lots were auctioned on the coldest day in local memory of January 10, 1857<sup>42</sup>. The west side of the square filled up quickly, and Mr. Mounts was among these first business owners in the new town, where he established Baines & Mounts on the west side of the square in the third building from the

south<sup>43</sup> with his business partners W. C. Baines and J. H. Mounts<sup>44</sup>. Their store burned July 21, 1860, along with much of the west side of the square in a devastating fire believed to have been arson, but which was never fully solved. Baines & Mounts had twenty-five kegs of black powder in it which exploded, scattering fragments of hardware and the building across the square. Their loss was estimated at \$20,000 at the time. Suspiciously, other fires occurred that same day in about ten other area communities within hours of the Denton fire, and at the time they were thought to be the act of abolitionists<sup>45</sup>.

Robert Mounts' mother, Martha (Mattie) Elizabeth Haynes (1838 - 1914) came to Denton County from Mississippi in 1860 with her family. She was the fifth child of Rev. John Haynes and Catherine Bell. Mattie Haynes' maternal grandfather was the Rev. Robert Bell, who was the first missionary to the Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians in Mississippi<sup>46</sup>. J. W. Gober, a Master Mason originally from Georgia, came to Denton County in 1853 and moved his family to the south side of Clear Creek one and one-half miles south of Sanger in 1857<sup>47</sup>, where he built a private schoolhouse for his children about 1860<sup>48</sup>. He engaged Mattie Haynes as teacher in his school<sup>49</sup>. On September 27, 1862, Miss Mattie E. Haynes married William H. Mounts<sup>50</sup>. On August 24, 1863<sup>51</sup>, their first child, Robert Noble Mounts<sup>52</sup>, was born.

The Mounts family was instrumental in the religious development of Denton from its earliest days. In November, 1862, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was organized in Denton with about six families. It was one of the earliest churches established in Denton and among its charter members was Robert Mounts' mother, Mattie Mounts<sup>53</sup>. The Presbyterians met in the Masonic Hall on South Elm Street, as did the Methodists and Baptists, the other two organizations in Denton at this time. The third original pastor was Rev. John Haynes, Mrs. Mounts' father<sup>54</sup>. There were no church buildings in Denton prior to the 1870s<sup>55</sup>. The

Cumberland Presbyterians were the first religious organization to build their own church in Denton, in 1871. It was located at the corner of Oak Street and Bolivar<sup>56</sup>. W. H. Mounts negotiated the purchase of this land along with Thomas E. Hogg, the brother of the governor<sup>57</sup>. The first Sunday School in Denton began in the spring or summer of 1868 and was organized by Mattie Mounts. It was a Union Sunday School which included children of the Baptists, Christians, Cumberland Presbyterians, and Methodists. This continued until the various churches opened their own Sunday Schools in the mid-1870s<sup>58</sup>. The Rev. John Haynes was a minister for sixty-seven years<sup>59</sup>, and Haynes St., which runs between the Robert Mounts House and the Mounts-Wright House, was named for him<sup>60</sup>.

The Mounts' involvement in business continued beyond Baines & Mounts. In the early 1860s, an ox-tread grist mill was built just north of the square on the west side of North Elm Street. In 1865, the mill was purchased by Robert Mounts' mother, Mattie Mounts. Although the mill was small and likely not in operation very long, it was apparently Denton's first industrial venture<sup>61</sup>. Even in these early times, Mr. Mounts' business ventures stretched far beyond Denton. A letter dated September 16, 1868, from a Denton County citizen to a friend in Arkansas stated, "W. H. Mounts is on his way to New York to buy goods and will go by way of New Orleans, Galveston, and Houston"<sup>62</sup>. By 1870, W. H. Mounts was apparently in business with a new partner, and their store, Billy Mounts and Stephens, was still located on the west side of the square<sup>63</sup>.

W. H. Mounts served during the Civil War in Co. D, McCord's Frontier Regiment Texas Cavalry<sup>64</sup>. He entered in February, 1863, as a Private and served until at least March 1, 1864, when the unit was transferred to the service of the Confederate States. He also served as a Hospital Steward<sup>65</sup>. W. H. Mounts' commander, Colonel James E. McCord, was appointed a



ranking officer of the Texas Frontier Regiment in 1862. Its original purpose was for the protection of the Indian frontier of Texas. It remained under state control until 1864<sup>66</sup>. Colonel McCord has a Texas Civil War Memorial historical marker, Marker Number 5083002523, in Coleman, Coleman County, Texas<sup>67</sup>.

On April 6, 1867, Emily Mounts sold the house she purchased from Joseph Bledsoe with about “15 acres more or less” for two-hundred dollars to her son William H. Mounts<sup>68</sup>, Robert Mounts’ father. This became known as the Mounts farm, the Mounts homestead, and in some accounts, Mounts Hill<sup>69</sup>. The Mounts farm extended by one account to within a few hundred yards of the square, and W. H. Mounts grew cotton<sup>70</sup> and had fruit orchards behind the house down the hill to the north<sup>71</sup>. The Mounts farm was actually about half-a-mile to the west of the square, and at the time was said to be far out in the country<sup>72</sup>. W. H. Mounts also had a stable and kept horses which were known to be of high quality<sup>73</sup>. The outlaw Sam Bass worked on the Gregg Ranch as well as for Mr. Mounts<sup>74</sup>, and Bass once stole a horse from his stable to obtain a better mount to aid in his escape plan<sup>75</sup>.

Denton was already well known for its focus on education by the early 1870’s<sup>76</sup>, and the Mounts family was included prominently in its development. At least fifty teachers were teaching privately in Denton prior to the first free public school in 1884. One of these was Robert Mounts’ mother, Mattie Mounts, who taught on the west side of South Elm Street and at her home on Mounts Avenue<sup>77</sup>. She later opened the first kindergarten in Denton in September, 1892, in the southern part of town<sup>78</sup>. Robert Mounts’ sister, Sena Mounts, taught third grade in the public school during the 1893 - 1894 school term, and taught intermediates during the 1894 - 1895 term<sup>79</sup>. His youngest sister, Alice Mounts, also taught in the Denton public schools<sup>80</sup>.

Working with livestock as he grew up was undoubtedly a big influence on Robert Mounts. About twenty years after Denton was organized, Texas cattle began pouring into northern markets. Prior to that, there were few cattle west of the ninety-ninth meridian, making Denton instrumental in the westward expansion of the cattle industry<sup>81</sup>. Around 1880, Robert Mounts, along with Frank A. Tompkins and several other young men, rode horses to Mexico and rounded up wild mustangs. They drove them back to Denton to the Gregg Ranch and broke them to use at the ranch<sup>82</sup>. Darius Gregg (1804 - 1870) was a surveyor and had been paid in land deeds. He was one of the founders of the Republic of Texas, and started the ranch consisting of about 15,000 to 20,000 acres northwest of Denton between 1850 and 1853. In 1868, he described the ranch land as, “No better country for cattle, hogs, horses, and sheep in the state, no better grain-growing country”. Darius Gregg’s son, William Bowen Gregg (1849 - 1889) inherited most of his father’s Denton County land in 1870. He operated the ranch in the 1870s and 1880s<sup>83</sup>.

On July 4, 1883, William Gregg married Robert Mounts’ sister, Emma Belle Mounts (1865 - 1957), second child of William and Mattie Mounts<sup>84</sup>. She was known for her beauty and musical ability, and often played guitar for the cowboys on the ranch in the evenings<sup>85</sup>. In 1887, Emma Mounts bought a strip of land off the southern end of the Mounts estate. She set aside the forty foot wide strip for Mounts Street<sup>86</sup> which was later renamed Gregg Street. This street is on the south boundary line of the Robert Mounts House. After the death of William Gregg in 1889, Robert Mounts managed the Gregg Ranch for many years<sup>87</sup>.

William H. Mounts, Robert’s father, died in 1889, but his mother Mattie continued to live in the family home until the house burned in the early 1890s<sup>88</sup>. On March 26, 1890, Emma remarried to Dr. Cuvier Lipscomb<sup>89</sup>, a prominent Denton physician. His family had come from

Mississippi, and in the spring of 1870 he came to Denton County from Tarrant County. He was described as a “finished gentleman” and a welcome citizen to Denton<sup>90</sup>. Dr. Lipscomb had his office in the back of his son’s drug store on the west side of the square<sup>91</sup>. Emma Mounts Gregg Lipscomb was a very wealthy young woman when she married Dr. Lipscomb<sup>92</sup>, and they built a beautiful Victorian home on West Oak Street. The Dr. Cuvier Lipscomb home was at 802 West Oak<sup>93</sup>, and Mounts Street, later renamed Gregg Street, ran behind their house.

On September 15, 1891, Robert Noble Mounts married Nannie Lee Christal (1870 - 1942)<sup>94</sup>, the daughter of James Christal, a Denton County pioneer<sup>95</sup>. One of the Christal family homes is on West Oak Street diagonally across from the Robert Mounts House and is a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL 2015). Dr. Lipscomb’s home was on the next corner west across the street from the Christal House and immediately south of the Robert Mounts House. In 1894, Robert Mounts was listed as living at Stony, due west of town, and he would come in to Denton on occasion for business<sup>96</sup>. In the summer of 1895, he was reportedly living in Krum to the northwest<sup>97</sup>. However, in November of 1895, he was again said to be a resident of Stony, so he may have had land somewhere in-between. In November, Stony was having a building boom, as it was reported that several residents had built new houses, and Robert Mounts had built a new barn<sup>98</sup>.

On March 2, 1896, Robert Mounts met with other prominent cattlemen in Denton and served as temporary secretary for the committee to help organize the Denton County Live Stock Protective Association, whose purpose was established for the mutual protection of the stockmen of Denton County<sup>99</sup>. Like other famous cattlemen of the Denton area, such as John Chisum whose brands were the “Jingle Bob” and the “Long Rail”, Burk Burnett of the “6666” brand, and

Crow Wright with his “Chain 7” brand, Robert Mounts is listed among the prominent cattlemen of Denton County<sup>100</sup> and had his own brand<sup>101</sup>.

On October 12, 1897, Emma Mounts and her husband sold a lot from the land she purchased from her father`s estate to their son Cuvier Lipscomb, Jr. for \$800<sup>102</sup>. Cuvier Lipscomb, Jr. in turn sold the lot to Robert and Nannie Mounts on August 20, 1898, for the same \$800<sup>103</sup>. This is the lot where the Robert Mounts House is located. On May 25, 1898, Mattie Mounts executed a mechanics lien for “a two-story frame house of 8 rooms”, to be built from plans she provided by J. B. Wilson, contractor, for the sum of eighteen-hundred dollars<sup>104</sup>. This house, known as the Mounts-Wright House, now stands at 403 Mounts Avenue and is an architectural twin to the Robert Mounts House. It is believed that these two houses were built at the same time by the same builder, J. B. Wilson, due to this mechanics lien and the similarity of their architecture. In a newspaper ad dated February 18, 1897, J. B. Wilson and Bro. was promoting their new lumber yard near the square on North Locust Street. J. B. Wilson operated his new business with his brother, A. M. Wilson. The ad indicated that the yard was stocked with a complete line of long-leaf pine lumber, shingles, sash, doors, and paint, and claimed to be a first-class lumber yard<sup>105</sup>. Robert Mounts was living on the Gregg Ranch at this time, and he and Nannie moved into their new house on November 1, 1898<sup>106</sup>.

Mattie Mounts later sold her house, the Mounts-Wright House at 403 Mounts Avenue, to her daughter and Robert Mounts’ sister, Sena Mounts Wright and her husband William W. Wright, after her health began to fail. Mattie moved in with her other daughter, Emma Lipscomb on West Oak Street, as Dr. Lipscomb could better see to her care there. She died in that home on January 14, 1914, after a lengthy illness<sup>107</sup>. Sena continued to live in the Mounts-Wright House for many years even after Mr. Wright’s death.

During the week of July 16, 1899, Robert Mounts made one of the largest cattle deals in recent Denton history, selling more than 800 head to a Dallas buyer, netting more than \$20,000 and making news in the *El Paso Daily Herald*<sup>108</sup>. On Christmas Day, 1899, Robert and Nannie Mounts sold the Robert Mounts House in Denton to Benjamin Beverly for \$2500 cash<sup>109</sup>.

Robert and Nannie moved to Hereford, Texas, in October of 1899, and by November he was already active there in the cattle business, attending the third meeting of the Panhandle Live Stock Association which had only been organized that September by 28 of the area's most prominent cattlemen. Also in attendance at the November meeting was the famous rancher Charles Goodnight, and the Lt. Governor who provided the opening speech. In his speech he stated that the developing ranges of the Texas Panhandle at the time would be a leading factor in the country's beef industry. Of over 300 cattlemen in attendance, Robert Mounts was among the few mentioned by name, attesting to his importance in the industry<sup>110</sup>.

In Hereford, Robert Mounts was an important figure in cattle ranching, politics, and banking, and Mrs. Nannie Mounts was socially active and involved in numerous philanthropic activities. Robert owned a big ranch west of town<sup>111</sup> and was said to be one of the foremost stockmen in the Panhandle. On September 9, 1905, he sold 614 yearling steers in Kansas at a price of \$19 a head, breaking all known price records of the day<sup>112</sup>. In 1911, he sold 1100 two-year-old steers for \$36 per head, impressive enough to make news in El Paso, and he was said to be one of Hereford's most successful cattlemen<sup>113</sup>. He frequently travelled to Kansas to market cattle<sup>114</sup>, won awards at cattle conventions<sup>115</sup>, and entertained prominent cattlemen in his home<sup>116</sup>. Robert Mounts was a Deaf Smith County Commissioner in 1902-1904<sup>117</sup>, ran for Sheriff in 1904<sup>118</sup>, was a Hereford City Councilman in 1909<sup>119</sup>, and was elected a city Alderman from 1906 to 1911<sup>120</sup>. When Hereford first became an independent school district in 1908,

Robert Mounts was elected to its first board of trustees<sup>121</sup>. In 1911, he was listed as a member of the Board of Directors of The First National Bank in Hereford<sup>122</sup>. The Robert Mounts family continued to reside in Hereford until sometime after Robert's death in 1922<sup>123</sup>.

Since its erection, the Robert Mounts House has had many owners, and few held the property for any duration. One exception is the Central Presbyterian Church which grew out of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church<sup>124</sup>. They purchased the house in December of 1919<sup>125</sup> as the manse, or parsonage, for their ministers. The Presbyterian Church was one of the earliest churches to develop in Denton after the establishment of the county seat, and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church building<sup>126</sup> can be seen on the 1883 "Birds Eye View of Denton" map drawn by Augustus Koch<sup>127</sup>. Membership in the church had grown to over 300 by 1919, and the former manse next to the church at Pearl and Boliver Streets had been remodeled for use as a Sunday School annex in 1914<sup>128</sup>. The Central Presbyterian Church held the Robert Mounts House property until 1943.

The Robert Mounts House is featured and pictured in the book *Manners of the Manse* (1959) by Nannie Morris Estes<sup>129</sup>, wife of Rev. Charles W. Estes. She devoted an entire chapter to their life in Denton and the Robert Mounts House from 1930 to 1935. The Robert Mounts House is located about halfway between what is today Texas Woman's University and the University of North Texas, and in her book Mrs. Estes writes of the joys of family life in the Robert Mounts House manse during much simpler times:

Through church, school, college, and civic activities, new acquaintances were made every day. New friends grew out of these meetings. Visiting students and their parents were welcomed at the manse. Many a homesick girl and boy enjoyed the hospitality at the "Preacher's House on the Hill." Frequently, "blind" dates were contrived by the children for other friends, for, you see, with one daughter in the girls' college and another daughter and a son at the teachers' college, the Preacher's family was a natural halfway place for students of both schools<sup>130</sup>. [T]here would always be visiting boys and girls of all ages-taking part in games, singing, making candy or conversing in serious tones on the big porches of the manse<sup>131</sup>.

The Central Presbyterian Church in 1930 was on or very near the same site as the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was on Augustus Koch's map of Denton from 1883. It continues to operate within a block of this site as St. Andrew Presbyterian Church today. Nannie Morris Estes' daughter, Lillian Estes, visited the Robert Mounts House in the early 1990s where she lived as a young woman and told stories of numerous weddings that took place in the front parlor with her father officiating. She described how each bride would descend the staircase during these ceremonies, and shared other special memories of her time living in the house.

Brian and Vicki Morrison purchased the Robert Mounts House in July, 1988, are the home's twentieth owners, and have been the home's longest custodian for 27 years. They are among the three original petitioners to first apply for the inclusion of the Mounts neighborhood into the Oak-Hickory Historic District in Denton. On January 22, 1991, the Robert Mounts House became a recognized City of Denton Historic Landmark, and on August 20, 1991, it was annexed into the Oak-Hickory Historic District along with the C. L. Oliver House and the Mounts-Wright House to the north.

The Robert Mounts House is an example of a Queen Anne style home which is in line with the other Denton homes of the period and the ranching interests of Robert Mounts and the Mounts family. The house is sheathed in clapboard lap siding and has subtle jig-saw ornamentation in the porch arches. Eastlake lathe, gouge and chisel work is found in the front door and stair balusters. The staircase features two landings with ninety degree turns. The floors inside are heart pine and the interior walls are covered in shiplap. The house features four gables covered in fish-scale shingles and a second-floor porch with straight shingle detail. The house has an asymmetrical floor plan with a stairway ascending to the second floor from the right side of the central entrance hall. There is a signature diamond window on the lower stair landing at

the front of the house next to the front door that is a visual focal point. From framing clues in the attic, it appears that a two-story north wing was added to the original structure. This improvement occurred prior to 1930 when the earliest known photograph of the house was taken. The kitchen to the rear appears to be an early addition, and several other later one-story additions-on-additions on the southwest corner were replaced with a better integrated design under a single roof in the early 1990s.

Many local streets still bear the names of the Mounts family and other families associated with them. There is Mounts Avenue, and the former Mounts Street which was later renamed Gregg Street for Emma Belle Mounts' first husband William Gregg. Both of these streets border the Robert Mounts House property. Haynes Street is named for Mattie Mounts' father, the Rev. John Haynes, and runs perpendicular to Mounts Avenue between the Robert Mounts House and the Mounts-Wright House. Alice Street is named for Alice Mounts, and Sena Street and Alleen Street are named for Sena Alleen Mounts, Robert Mounts' two youngest sisters. Gober Street is named for J. W. Gober, one of Denton County's early pioneers and the employer of Miss Mattie Haynes (Mounts). Crow Street is named for Crow Wright, Sena Mounts' father-in-law.

### **III. SIGNIFICANCE**

The Robert Mounts House was built by Robert Noble Mounts and his wife Nannie Lee Christal Mounts in 1898. Robert Mounts was a pioneer in ranching in the early days of Denton and helped to expand the cattle industry westward. He managed the vast Gregg Ranch and brokered some of the largest cattle sales in Denton County in the 1890s.

The Mounts family came from Virginia to Denton County in the 1850s and was very important to the development of early Denton. The Mounts farm of about fifteen acres included



the land where the Robert Mounts House sits, and the original homestead was at the top of the hill to the north facing West Oak Street. The drive to that house became Mounts Avenue.

Robert Mounts' father, W. H. Mounts, was a businessman, farmer, and landowner, and was one of the first business owners to bring his business to the new county seat of Denton from New Alton in 1857. His mother, Mattie Haynes Mounts, formed the first Sunday school in Denton in 1868 and opened the first kindergarten on South Elm Street in 1892. Robert Mounts' grandfather, Rev. John Haynes, was the third pastor of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the first organization to build a church house in Denton in 1871.

Robert Mounts moved to Hereford in the Texas Panhandle in 1899 where he owned a large ranch west of the town and was an important figure there in cattle ranching, politics, and banking. He was said to be one of the foremost stockmen in the Panhandle and helped open Texas cattle markets to the north. Robert Mounts resided in Hereford until his death, April 13, 1922. He is buried in IOOF Cemetery in Denton alongside other members of the Mounts family.

The Presbyterian Church's connection to the Robert Mounts House came full circle with its use as a manse for their ministers from 1919 to 1943.

#### IV. DOCUMENTATION

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<sup>4</sup> Bridges, C.A. *History of Denton, Texas, From its Beginning to 1960*. Waco, Texas: Texian Press, 1978, Page 68.

<sup>5</sup> Bridges, Page 75.

<sup>6</sup> County Deed Record, DR/0000D/213, filed 01/08/1859, Denton.

<sup>7</sup> Gard, Wayne, *Sam Bass*, University of Nebraska Press, 1969, Page 175.

<sup>8</sup> McCormick, Page 79

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<sup>10</sup> Bridges, Page 170.

<sup>11</sup> Bridges, Page 87.

<sup>12</sup> Bates, Edmund Franklin, *History and Reminiscences of Denton County*, (Denton, Texas: McNitzky Printing, 1918), Page 374.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.fold3.com/>, accessed July 27, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Bridges, Page 104.

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<sup>17</sup> McCormick, Page 81.

<sup>18</sup> Bridges, Page 105-106.

<sup>19</sup> Deed Record, DR Vol. 00042 Page 520, filed 07/30/1892, Denton.

<sup>20</sup> Deed Records, Denton County.

<sup>21</sup> Deed Record, Vol. 00065 Page 284, filed 08/23/1898, Denton.

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- <sup>24</sup> Deed Record, DR Vol. 00171 Page 109, filed 12/23/1919, Denton.
- <sup>25</sup> Oral history provided to Brian and Vicki Morrison by Lillian Estes c. 1990.
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- <sup>27</sup> Mounts Family Genealogy record, private collection of Brian and Vicki Morrison.
- <sup>28</sup> Mounts Family Genealogy record, private collection of Brian and Vicki Morrison.
- <sup>29</sup> Republic of Texas Deed Record, Denton County, DR/0000M/288, Denton, view July 9, 2015.
- <sup>30</sup> McCormick, Page 110-111.
- <sup>31</sup> Republic of Texas Deed Record, Denton County, DR/0000A/363, view July 9, 2015.
- <sup>32</sup> McCormick, Page 110-111.
- <sup>33</sup> Bridges, Page 67-68.
- <sup>34</sup> Bridges, Page 70.
- <sup>35</sup> County Deed Record, DR/0000D/213, filed 01/08/1859, Denton.
- <sup>36</sup> McCormick, Page 79.
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<sup>42</sup> Bridges, Page 71-72.

<sup>43</sup> Bridges, Page 74-75.

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<sup>45</sup> Bridges, Page 92-93.

<sup>46</sup> “John R. Haynes: 1798 – 1895, Cumberland Presbyterian Minister”. Accessed July 31, 2015.  
<http://www.cumberland.org/hfcpc/minister/HaynesJR.htm>

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<sup>54</sup> “Presbyterians Sell Early-Day Church; Erecting New Structure.” *Denton Record-Chronicle*. 8 November, 1941: 3. Print.

<sup>55</sup> McCormick, Page 81.

<sup>56</sup> Bridges, Page 153.

<sup>57</sup> “Presbyterians Sell Early-Day Church; Erecting New Structure.” *Denton Record-Chronicle*. 8 November, 1941: 3. Print.

<sup>58</sup> Bridges, Page 105-106.

<sup>59</sup> “John R. Haynes: 1798 – 1895, Cumberland Presbyterian Minister”. Accessed July 31, 2015.  
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<sup>60</sup> Hall letter, 1990.

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<sup>62</sup> Bates, Page 374.

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<sup>64</sup> National Park Service Civil War Soldiers and Sailors Database, <http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-soldiers-detail.htm?soldierId=7847FABC-DC7A-DF11-BF36-B8AC6F5D926A>, accessed July 27, 2015.

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<sup>74</sup> Mrs. Charles A. Hall and E. Dale Odom. "Gregg Ranch. Family still owns part of early county spread." *Denton Record-Chronicle* 4 July, 1976: 62. Print.

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<sup>78</sup> Bridges, Page 216.

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<sup>80</sup> "Mrs. Cockrell Dies in Dallas." *Denton Record-Chronicle*. 25 August, 1944: 2. Print.

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<sup>94</sup> Mounts Family Genealogy record, private collection of Brian and Vicki Morrison.

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<sup>97</sup> "Personal Mention." *Denton County News* 6 June, 1895: 8. Print.

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<sup>126</sup> Bridges, Page 153.

<sup>127</sup> Koch, 1883.

<sup>128</sup> St. Andrew Mission Study 2015, pg. 4-5,  
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<sup>130</sup> Estes, page 67.

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