

The Roots of Williamsburg: A Vision and a Legacy

By Judith McGlaughlin

One Creek West, Inc.

Welcome to our new series of essays, which celebrate the history of the community we call home. For One Creek West, this community is the 40 or so neighborhoods located north of Interstate-10 and largely in the unincorporated area between the City of Houston and the City of Katy.

History? Why are you writing about our history? As an “unincorporated area between Katy and Houston”, we don’t even have a name. How could we have a history? What value could it have for us today?

So - the idea came from a colleague, who asked the simple question, “Who planted the grove of pecan trees at Cullen Park?” To be honest, I didn’t even realize there was a grove of pecan trees in Cullen Park. I only drove past them each day on my way to work since 1992. But, this winter, they were in stress, and she wanted to take care of them – and asked how they got here. The answer was not so easy to find: this piece of land was part of the U.S. Government’s confiscation of land for the Addicks Reservoir – and historical records are incomplete. But the search created a wealth of information about other parcels of land, about other individuals and families who settled the land we know and left a bit of themselves behind. They are not famous, by any stretch, but their individual stories – or what we could gather as their memories fade – are both real and compelling.

We’d like to share the stories for each neighborhood in our coalition, for each neighborhood (or, perhaps, adjacent neighborhoods) has a story and characters unique to it. For this issue, we will focus on the neighborhoods on the west side of Mason Road – Williamsburg Settlement and Williamsburg Colony. These neighborhoods were carved out of two adjacent 640-acre tracts awarded to two different railroads, who were granted land by the State of Texas to fuel the settlement of the vast acreage that made up the new state. Along the journey, you will find names well-recognized in the history of Old Katy and other less well-known names – all playing a role in the larger cultural and technological changes that defined Williamsburg and the other neighborhoods in our community.

Some of you may recall that Williamsburg Settlement and Williamsburg Colony (along with neighboring Williamsburg Hamlet and Williamsburg Parish) share a common legacy – all from the vision of Houston developer, Marvin Leggett. In the early 1970’s, Leggett planned to build [Williamsburg](#), the first modern planned community to complement then-under-construction Park Ten – which speculators claimed would become a second downtown. Mason Road was expected to become Grand Parkway. The neighborhood would be split into multiple sections, with home prices ranging from \$30,000 to \$300,000 (which is \$2.5 million in today’s dollars). The most expensive homes would sit around a man-made lake large enough to warrant a marina. But, the project stalled during the 1973 oil crisis, and Marvin Leggett passed away in 1985. While Leggett’s firm would continue the project, they just didn’t seem to have the same grand dream he had envisioned.

But the story of Williamsburg begins long before Leggett’s grand vision. Immediately following the Texas Revolution and during the early years of Texas’s statehood, the state issued land grants to encourage settlement of its vast territory. These grants were awarded to individuals and railroad companies alike. For every mile of track laid, railroads received sizable sections of land—each section totaling 640 acres. A single mile of track could yield over 10,000 acres, which the railroads then sold to fund more

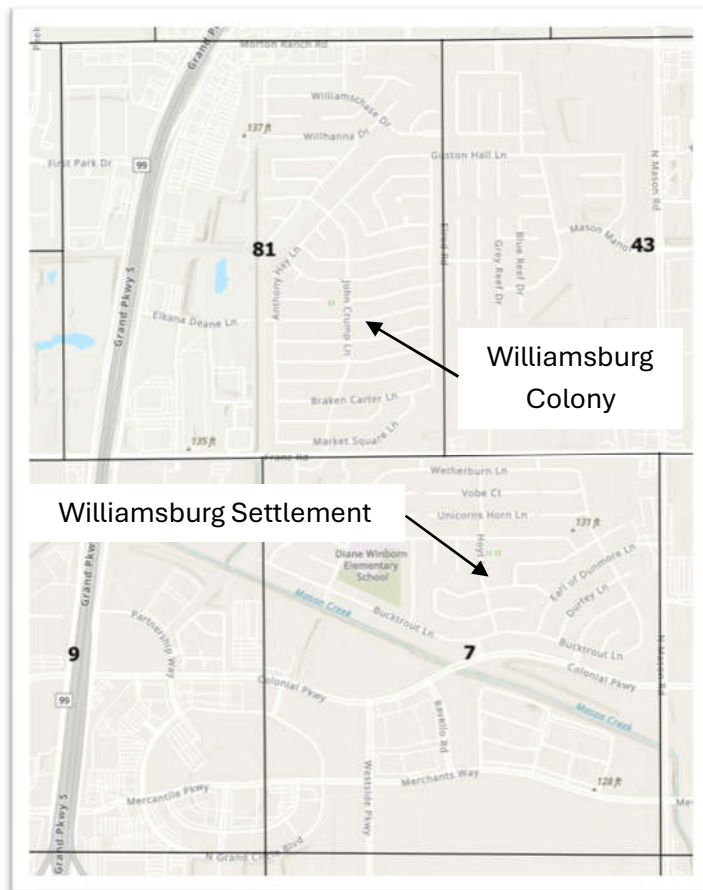


Figure 1 – The 640-acre tracts where the two Williamsburg communities are located.

construction. The section where Williamsburg Settlement is located was initially awarded to the Washington County Railroad Company (WCRR) in 1879; Williamsburg Colony is located in one of the Houston and Texas Central Railway Company's (H&TC RR) 640-acre sections awarded in 1887.

But for more than 50 years after the railroads were granted this land, it was owned by a "[femme sole](#)" (an unmarried woman with the legal status to own property) named Maud Hickman. Now, historically, the name "Maud" means "battle mighty", befitting those called to tame the uncharted lands of our Texas prairie. However, Maud Hickman was no warrior; she was a music teacher from the midwestern town of Springfield, Illinois, and her affairs – and that of her family – were followed closely in the society pages of the [Houston Post-Dispatch](#).

[Her land was first purchased in 1902](#) by her father, Dr. Cornelius Hickman, a respected physician in Springfield. He

conveyed that land to Maude in 1908. But it wasn't until 1914 that Dr. Hickman moved his entire family – his wife, Maud, her sister Rae, and a Mr. Edwin Duffield - to Texas. Before 1914, the family traveled frequently to Houston and Katy, building social standing in both places.

After the move, Dr. Hickman resumed his medical practice in what was then known as the Houston Heights (West University Place today), and Edwin and Rae – herself a figure of some notoriety in Katy/Houston social circles – married. By the early 1920's, Maud had secured her role in Katy as a music teacher – and organized the "[Amateur Music Club](#)". *"The Amateur Musical Club", reported the Houston Post, "organized on Friday night by Miss Maud Hickman, teacher of music here, is a long stride of advantage to the younger set. The benefits gained by research and study as a collective body will far exceed individual effort for the pupil. The present members are [Gilbert Douglas](#), [Malcolm Stewart](#), [Alvis Belton](#), [Mason Adcock](#), [Marjorie Fromme](#), [Evelyn Baird](#), [Evelyn Mathias](#), [Flossie Whitson](#), [Iris Hailey](#) and [Fannie May Rose](#)."* As best we can tell, the members of the Amateur Music Club were socially prominent in Old Katy's vibrant society. Malcolm Stewart was a widely known South Texas physician. Mason Adcock built the historical Wilkinson-Schneider home in 1915. Evelyn Baird was the daughter of Calvin Leroy Baird, the City of Katy's first mayor in 1947.

Rae gave birth to a daughter in 1921 who, sadly, died at just 14 months. Another daughter came in 1924, Betty Adrian, and became part of the Duffield's [social circles in Katy](#): *"Mr. and Mrs. Ed Duffield*

and baby Bettie, with Miss Maud Hickman of Houston Heights, were calling on their many friends in Katy Sunday.” (Houston Post-Dispatch, November 16, 1924).

But tragedy was soon to find the Hickman family. Edwin passed away in 1927 at just 37 years old. Mrs. Hickman died in 1930; Dr. Hickman, 3 years later - and both were buried in Katy Magnolia Cemetery, where Edwin had been laid to rest. Maud and Rae would also be buried in the Katy Magnolia Cemetery years later.

After Dr. Hickman’s death, both Maud and Rae lived at the family home in Houston. Maud continued to manage her property from Houston. Her name can be found on many agreements that give utility and transmission companies [access to easements](#) to prepare the land for future development. In 1959 (which was also the year of her death), she sold the Williamsburg Settlement property. Rae and her daughter managed the Williamsburg Colony property and sold it to investors in 1972. After Rae’s death, her daughter Betty moved to Oklahoma.

Why spend so much time on the Hickman family? The answer is that their story demonstrates a bigger picture of how our area was settled. Dr. Hickman’s land purchase was part of a broader effort by railroad land agents to attract immigrants – particularly from Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa - to Katy. And it worked. Many families moved to Katy in the early 1900’s, and Katy became a thriving agricultural community. The fertile prairies and agricultural opportunities made Katy a center for rice cultivation, leading to a peak of about 60,000 acres under cultivation by the 1920s.

This exponential growth was largely due to the efforts of [Adam Henry Stockdick](#), one of the pioneers of Katy and well-recognized for his significant contributions to the community. Stockdick was hired by the MKT Railroad to promote the new town and get it populated. Stockdick placed ads in newspapers promising splendid orchards, flourishing crops, and booming oil business - if only the reader would move to Katy, TX. Stockdick didn’t just promote; he organized the land sales, staked out properties, and drew up legal documents. By 1900, a large number of families had arrived and had started farms in the location. Indeed, the owner of the 160 acres that Dr. Hickman purchased in 1902 was none other than Adam Stockdick.

It wasn’t until April of 1959 that Maud Hickman sold the Williamsburg Settlement tract to Eugene Hoyt, Jr. Like Maud, Hoyt was an immigrant to Katy, having been born in Kansas in 1904. His family moved to Oklahoma in 1910, and we can place him in Texas in 1913. He was married to Irene Hooker in Fort Bend County in 1926. He and his wife had 6 children, and perhaps more than anything, they were rice farmers, plowing fields with oxen and mules and channeling water from Mason Creek to irrigate their fields. Indeed, his father, Frederick Eugene Hoyt, Sr., also moved to Texas - and was (according to his grandson, Rogers S. Hoyt) one of the first rice farmers in the area.

One of Eugene Hoyt Jr.’s children was [Nancy Jean Hoyt](#) - who married her high school sweetheart, Tom Cromwell Cardiff, Sr. in 1949. Nancy would sometimes ride her horse to school in Katy and was the only Katy student to be an FFA Sweetheart two times. The Cardiff family were also rice farmers. However, farming technology in the 1940s was progressing, and drying and storing rice in buildings replaced letting it dry in the fields. J.V. Cardiff was the second in the area to install the new system, which would allow farmers to dry their rice as it is harvested. J.V. Cardiff also built the first all-concrete rice drier in the State of Texas in Katy. The [Katy Rice Dryers](#) have been known by generations as the community’s most famous icons.

Yet, improvements to tractors, trucks, combines, fertilizers, machinery, wells and types of rice brought many changes to the industry. In the early 20th century, an acre of land might produce eight barrels of milled rice from an operation requiring the work of dozens of field hands. That same acre today might produce 80 to 100 barrels, with many fewer personnel involved. As a result, the [total acreage in Katy devoted to rice has decreased](#), from a high of more than 60,000 acres in the 1970's to around 6,000, and the town's rice driers are now dormant.

For families like the Hoyts, seeking new opportunities outside of Katy became more attractive. Third-generation rice farmer, [Rogers Hoyt](#) (who began farming rice immediately after high school) established a ranching operation in Uvalde and Zavala counties in 1974, while still farming rice in Katy. Rogers was a resident of Uvalde County until the time of his death in 2018.

With families such as Stockdick, Hoyt, and Cardiff playing such an important role, it's clear that the Williamsburg neighborhoods draw their history from the icons of Old Katy. But, we can also find the influence of the German immigrants who settled Bear Creek – and built the community of Addicks, Texas – in the Williamsburg history. That influence resulted in perhaps the only historical landmark that remains.

The story again begins with Adam Stockdick, who owned not just the southeast corner of the 640-acre tract where Williamsburg Colony was built: he owned all four quadrants. At some point (before 1942), he sold the southwest quadrant to [Peter David Franz and his wife, Annie Dopslauf Franz](#). The story of Annie Dopslauf and her family can be found in the history of Raintree Village, in Westfield, in Rolling Green and Woodfern, when we again profile a remarkable woman by the name of [Minnie Auga Otte Dopslauf-Krauel](#).

For now, just know that Peter and Annie Franz had two daughters, one of which was [Earline Frieda Franz Moehle Robbins Kutschbach](#) (these folks seemed to marry multiple times with some regularity). Earline's stepson by her husband's first marriage was [James Alfred Moehle](#). In the spirit of love, Earline conveyed five acres to James. We are told that James and his family took in young homeless kids and raised them – and used them on the farm. The farmhouse appears to have been converted over the years, and the site still stands as a storage facility.

James Alfred Moehle died in 2021 at the age of 86 and is buried at the Bear Creek Cemetery on SH-6 and Patterson Road. Also buried at this historic cemetery are Peter David Franz, Annie Dopslauf Franz, and their daughter Earline Franz.

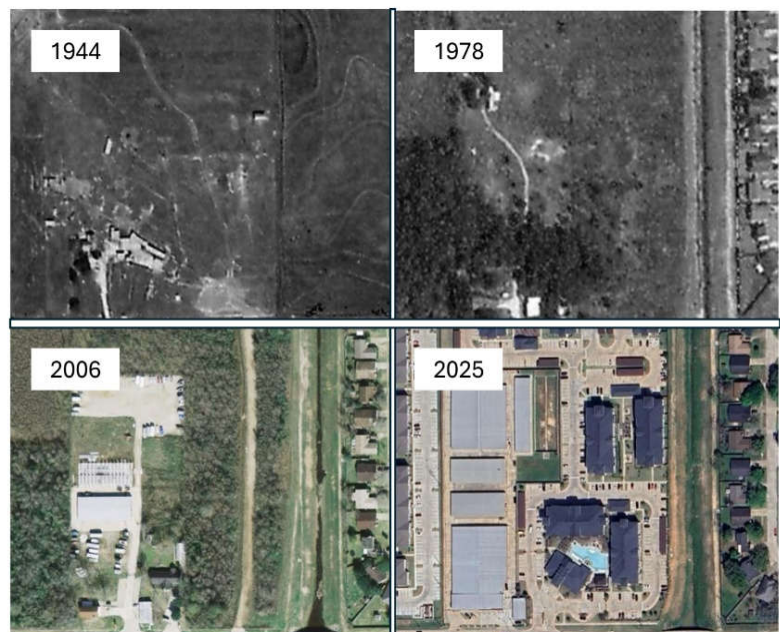


Figure 2 - The Moehl farm location, now 23515 Franz Road.

We started with what might be called a modern-day history: a vision by a mid-twentieth-century developer to create a new urban center for Houston. The question then becomes: did Marvin Leggett's vision of the "Williamsburg" communities contribute to the decline in Katy's role as the "Rice Capital of the World"?

In retrospect, it seems unlikely: the technology for growing, storing, milling, and distributing Katy-area rice forced many farms to look for other ways to create value from their land. Many farmers moved to other small towns - but many Katy legacy families remain, leaving us a tradition of hard work, innovation, and a love of the land. Even with all the changes that have occurred in the use of that land, we can and have carried that tradition forward. Maud Hickman, Eugene Hoyt, and James Moehle would be proud.