

William Dodson, the first Mayor of Farmers Branch, was born in Malakoff, Texas on January 6, 1895.<sup>1</sup> Dodson met his wife, Maude Gilmore in High School and they were married on July 6, 1917 in Fort Worth.<sup>2</sup> The year 1918 was bittersweet for the Dodsons – Bill was inducted into the US military on May 25<sup>th</sup>, and served with the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during WWI<sup>3</sup> and their son Smith was born on November 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>4</sup> The 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry was a Texas National Guard unit comprised largely of Texans and Oklahomans that spent 23 days in combat in the waning days of WWI.<sup>5</sup> Bill served as a Private in the 133<sup>rd</sup> Machine Gun Battalion and after returning home, Dodson applied for and was awarded the Victory Medal for service in the Meuse-Argonne sector.<sup>6</sup>

While Bill was overseas, he met two life-long friends who would eventually move with the Dodsons to Farmers Branch. After WWI ended, the Dodsons moved to Dallas with his war buddies Roy McKee and Adam Davidson. Dodson became active in real estate and the oil business; he and Maude purchased homes, fixed them up and then sold them at a profit. Dodson later focused his energies on the oil industry, a career path that was followed by his son, William Smith.<sup>7</sup>

The Dodsons came to Farmers Branch through a real estate transaction with Adam Davidson. Davidson had purchased the Gilbert House (which was built in 1856) and the surrounding land in 1933.<sup>8</sup> Today, that would be roughly the area between Ford Road and Denton Drive, south of Farmers Branch Lane. Due in part to the Great Depression, Davidson's fortunes shifted and he was forced to sell the Gilbert property to M.D. McKee

– the brother of Roy McKee. On February 27, 1937 Bill Dodson and his WWI comrade Roy McKee purchased the property from Roy's brother M.D. McKee.<sup>9</sup>

Maude Dodson put her foot down and told her husband that she had no desire to live in the “old rock house”, as the Gilbert House was known at the time.<sup>10</sup> So while the McKees were busy moving into the Gilbert House and renovating it to their needs, the Dodsons were building their first new home together. Ross Faulkner, a long time friend of the Dodsons who was in the construction business, built the home based on specifications provided to him by Maude<sup>11</sup> and by the winter of 1937, the Dodsons had moved into their new house.<sup>12</sup> The original location of the house was approximately 200 feet to the southwest of the present day location of the Dodson House, closer to Farmers Branch Creek. Also built at the same time were a garage and the original grill house, which Maude recalled, had been built by the W.P.A.<sup>13</sup>

By 1942, the Dodsons realized the mistake of building so close to a flood prone creek and recruited the help of their friends and neighbors to move their home to higher ground in that year. The house and garage were moved, a new grill house was built and a sunroom was added to the home.<sup>14</sup> In addition, a washroom was added to the back of the garage.<sup>15</sup> Maude's brother, Humphrey Gilmore assisted with some of the masonry and carpentry work that developed due to moving the house.<sup>16</sup>

Bill had long ties with the Masonic organization, having been initiated, passed, and raised by Metropolitan Lodge #1182 in 1924. After moving to Farmers Branch, Dodson

continued his involvement with the Masons and requested to join Lodge 395 in Farmers Branch on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1945.<sup>17</sup> Bill's involvement with the Masons would be useful after the incorporation of Farmers Branch, with several of the early City Council meetings taking place at the local Masonic Lodge.<sup>18</sup>

Bill and Maude were well known for their wonderful sense of humor, neighbor John Good recalled many humorous memories of the time when he lived across the street from the Dodsons. Mr. Good also recalls clearly the powerful scent of bbq being cooked at the Dodson's grill house as a child – "After that pit got seasoned, when they'd fire it up, the whole neighborhood would just smell glorious! And you knew dinner was going to be awfully good."<sup>19</sup>

In 1946, due to his business connections in Dallas, Bill brought news to his neighbors and friends – including Oran and Truett Good, Thomas Reeder, and Roy McKee - that the City of Dallas was considering the annexation of Farmers Branch<sup>20</sup>. Dallas was about 12 miles away at the time, and while the residents of Farmers Branch found annexation hard to believe in 1946, it stands out quite clearly that they were right – since today the City of Dallas ends right across I-635. The Dodsons, and their neighbors the Goods, Reeder, and McKees formulated a petition for the incorporation of Farmers Branch and obtained 38 signatures, 18 more than were required. Roy Rasberry presented the petition to County Judge Al Templeton on January 29, 1946 beginning the official transformation of Farmers Branch from a community to a City.<sup>21</sup>

Many of the early planning meetings for incorporation took place either in the Dodson House or in its back yard, near the grill house. Once the City became incorporated, William Dodson was the obvious choice to be the City's first Mayor – a position he held until 1948.<sup>22</sup>

Until Farmers Branch built a City Hall, Council meetings were held throughout the City at various locations. Three Council meetings, on July 9, July 23, and August 12, 1946 were held in the Dodson House<sup>23</sup>. The establishment of a water system<sup>24</sup>; the creation of the Farmers Branch Fire Department<sup>25</sup>; the delegation of the job of Tax Collector;<sup>26</sup> were some of the agenda items under discussion at these early Council meetings.

In the formative times of the City, there were no City employees, so the Councilmen had to pull double duty. Often times, they would work at their 'regular' job during the day and then take care of City business, like maintenance, in the evening.<sup>27</sup> The community chipped in as well, organizing a fair to raise money to build a City Hall and a Fire Station for the fledgling municipality.<sup>28</sup>

Under Dodson's term as Mayor, the City joined the League of Texas Municipalities<sup>29</sup>; hired the first City employees;<sup>30</sup> contracted out sanitation services<sup>31</sup>; and established phone rates with Southwestern Bell.<sup>32</sup> Dodson served as Mayor until April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1948 when he installed Oran Good as the new Mayor of Farmers Branch.<sup>33</sup>

Shortly after Bill's term as Mayor, he passed away on June 3, 1949 at the age of 54 at Methodist Hospital in Dallas.<sup>34</sup> Maude stayed at the home she and Bill had built in Farmers Branch until the winter of 1983. She had sold the house to the City in 1981 with the understanding that she be allowed to stay as long as she wished. The City planned to use the house as a cornerstone of its planned Historical Park, which would open to the public in 1986.

In 1989, the Dodson House underwent a major restoration. The house was lifted from its foundation and placed in the front yard until a new foundation was built and the home was returned to the same location. The exterior of the structure was repaired and the interior somewhat modernized to accommodate receptions, meetings, and office space.<sup>35</sup>

2001 again saw the Dodson House experience major external restoration. Much of the original siding was rotten and the paint on the structure contained lead. Combined, this facilitated the complete replacement of the original siding with siding that is completely identical to the original, but lacking lead paint.<sup>36</sup> As can be seen in the accompanying images, the current appearance of the Dodson House is indistinguishable from early photographs of the structure.

Today, the Dodson House serves a variety of functions. The offices of the Farmers Branch Historical Park are upstairs while the downstairs area is regularly utilized for meetings, receptions, and group tours. Farmers Branch itself has grown from a

population of 752 in 1946 to over 27,000 today – a lasting legacy to William Dodson and his goal to create one of the finest cities in North Texas.

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<sup>1</sup> William Dodson's Service Records, stamped 1921; William Dodson's Death Certificate, 6/3/49

<sup>2</sup> Phone interview with Maude Dodson on 5/25/84

<sup>3</sup> William Dodson's Service Records

<sup>4</sup> Smith Dodson's Obituary; *Dallas Morning News* 12/21/98 (verify date)

<sup>5</sup> "The 36th Division in WWI" website of the Texas Military Forces Museum  
<http://www.kwanah.com/txmilmus/36division/archives/wwi/white/chap6.htm>

<sup>6</sup> William Dodson's Service Records and Application for Victory Medal, dated 1/24/1921

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Maude Dodson on 5/24/84; Smith Dodson's obituary

<sup>8</sup> Deed Records, Dallas County Records Building, Vol. 1450 pgs 18, 19

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Vol. 2011, pg 234

<sup>10</sup> Maude Dodson Interview on 5/24/84

<sup>11</sup> Maude Dodson Interview on 11/16/86

<sup>12</sup> Maude Dodson Interview on 5/24/84

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. On May 6, 1935, the Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.) was created to help provide economic relief to the citizens of the United States who were suffering through the Great Depression.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 11/16/86

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 5/24/84

<sup>16</sup> Interview with John Good, 9/30/03

<sup>17</sup> William Dodson's Demit from Lodge 1182, 5/10/45; William Dodson's Petition for Affiliation with Lodge 395, 7/7/45

<sup>18</sup> Many of the founding meetings took place at the lower level of the Masonic Lodge. See Farmers Branch City Council minutes dated 5/27/1946, 6/11/46, 6/26/46, 8/12/47, 8/26/47, 9/9/47, etc.

<sup>19</sup> John Good Interview on 9/30/03

<sup>20</sup> Maude Dodson Interview on 5/24/84

<sup>21</sup> City of Farmers Branch, Ordinance #1, 11/26/46

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> City of Farmers Branch Council minutes on dates 7/9/46, 7/23/46, and 8/12/46

<sup>24</sup> City of Farmers Branch Council minutes, 4/25/46

<sup>25</sup> City of Farmers Branch Council minutes, 6/11/46

<sup>26</sup> City of Farmers Branch Council minutes, 5/8/46

<sup>27</sup> City of Farmers Branch Council minutes, 6/26/46

<sup>28</sup> Maude Dodson Interview on 4/25/84

<sup>29</sup> City of Farmers Branch Council Minutes, 5/8/46

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> City Ordinance #11, 3/9/48

<sup>33</sup> City of Farmers Branch Council Minutes, 4/8/48

<sup>34</sup> William Dodson's Death Certificate, 6/3/49

<sup>35</sup> City contract with Crawford Construction dated 8/22/88

<sup>36</sup> Parks and Recreation Department memo from Derrick Birdsall to Jeff Fuller, 9/11/00