Hand-Adams House History

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In September 2007, Jan Jones from Weatherford, TX, and who, with her husband, has had a career over the last 35 years as a designer and homebuilder, contacted the Harlingen Public Library. An inquiry was made concerning a house built by Jones's greatgrandparents in Harlingen about 1918 to 1920. A photograph of the house was enclosed in the letter.

It was revealed that James J. Hand had settled in the late 1860s on a Stephens County ranch after having been a trail rider with the famed cattlemen Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving (of Weatherford) after whom a cattle drive trail to Colorado was named. When the oil speculation and shenanigans in the Ranger, Texas area became too much for his likings, Hand and his wife Emma H. came to Harlingen where they settled. An abstract indicates that they purchased property described as the Old Snavely Place, 23 acre of Farm Blocks 11 and 12, Survey 36, Cameron County. This was likely sold to them by Lon C. Hill's Harlingen Land and Water Improvement Company, for Hill had purchased Survey 36 years before. An examination of an old map shows these parcels to be what is now on North 1st Street at Austin Avenue. The parcels straddled the Zavala lateral canal which has since been placed underground where it traverses North 1st Street.

The Hands, who were interested in farming, also purchased the east part of Block 27 in the Lon C. Hill Subdivision of Survey 36. This is currently a parcel immediately south of the 77/83 Expressway frontage road between Iowa and Louisiana Streets. The Hands are thought to have planted citrus on this parcel that it now occupied by commercial businesses and low-cost housing.

The Hands had eleven children, five boys and six girls. One boy died at age three. Another son, about 21 or 22, died of cancer while attending a college in Abilene. Son Jesse, noted below, died of typhoid, contacted apparently from swimming in a Harlingen pool.

A look at the 1930 Harlingen telephone directory compiled by November 4, 1929 lists Emma Hand, widow of James J., living at 1019 N. 1st Street. This is on the west side of the street, three blocks beyond the city's north boundary. Jones relates that the Hands first erected a one-story structure on the lot then later raised it and constructed a new ground floor. The photograph provided shows a handsome house with a hipped roof and four dormers. It, therefore, had three living floor spaces. The first and second stories had wide porches. The house is described as in the classic Alabama architectural style. Hand had left Alabama for Texas when he was about 16.

Mrs. Hand is listed as living at that location in 1939, the year she died. Both Hands are buried in the Harlingen City Cemetery. He was born 12/26/1849 and died 3/26/24 at age 74. Martha Emma Hand was born 2/3/1868 and died 10/18/39, age 71. Another Hand is
buried in the Harlingen Cemetery. He is son Jesse D. Hand born 9/30/99, died 12/15/19 at age 20. Mr. Hand died of pneumonia which attacked him following an accident. He was leading a horse and had the reins tightly wrapped around his hand. An automobile backfired and the noise spooked the horse that then dragged Mr. Hand some distance.

In the 1935 directory is found a listing for J. Roy Hand and his wife Norma. He is into the produce business, and they live at 133 W. Buchanan Avenue. In the 1937-38 directory he is listed as a farmer and at the North 1st Street address. In the 1941 directory their address is given as 1000 N. 1st Street, and two children under 18 years of age reside with them. Roy was an avid fisherman. In 1944 Roy is employed as the floor manager for Guy Morris and Associates. This is a fruit and vegetable shipping firm. In 1948 he is listed as a shipper. Don and Jimmy Hand, his sons and noted to be students, are listed as living in an apartment at 313 E. Monroe. In 1952 Don is listed as a college student.

Somewhat of an unknown in this scenario is the individual later listed as (Glen) Odon Hand in 1958 and married to Dianne with one child at home on 1709 E. Madison. He is listed as a farmer but shortly thereafter becomes a vegetable buyer for the large A & P Tea Company food retail chain. He stays in this occupation at least through 1971. In the 1980 directory, only Dianne is listed, and she is a teacher's aide with the HCISD.

In 1965 James (Jimmy) Hand becomes executive vice president of Tropical Savings and Loan.

The youngest daughter of Jesse and Emma, Emma Lee, married and divorced. Her second marriage was to Horace Hartsell. This occurred about 1936. They continued to reside in Harlingen until at least 1948. Over the years Horace was employed at Goodrich, Valley Baking Company, Rio Grande National Life Insurance Co., and then for Sears.

For directories of the next nine years no record can be found of the residences at 1019, the reason being that the directory now included only Harlingen city limits subscribers and 1019 was still beyond the city limits.

About 1948 Elijah Bert Adams and his wife Ruth Eleanor purchased the house. They made it into an apartment complex. Around the year 1949 farmer Adams constructed a new edifice adjacent to and north of the old Hand home. This attractive red brick, one-story ranch style house exists today at 1019 N. 1st. Bert and Ruth then moved into it with daughter Harriet and sons Harvey and Earl.

In 1959 and 1960, Mr. Adams in addition to his farming around the Combes area was secretary of the Farmers Gin Corp. Its gin was at the corner of N. Commerce and Jefferson Avenue, Harlingen. Mr. Adams was to pass away and by 1980 his widow will have remarried one Elmer B. King, who took up residence with her in the ranch house.

In 1950 the Adams rented out the Hand place. The house was subdivided into two rental units. The directory for that year shows R. L. Schmidt, a salesman, his wife Lorraine, and one child living upstairs at 1015, the number that the Adams family was being used. This unit was apparently accessible by stairs from the rear side of the structure. A John C. Simicek, salesman, rented 1015 downstairs.
The city was later to renumber the lot site. The Adams' new house would become 1019 while the old house was mostly 1015 and 1015 ½ but sometimes listed as 1013.

Following is a list of tenants of the Hand-Adams House over the years:

1952 At 1015 Kirby L. Townsend, his wife Louise and one child. He was an employee at The Man's Shop.
At 1015 ½ Jack D. Knight and his wife Agnes. He was a salesman.
1954 through 1955 At 1015 L. W. "Jack" Cox, his wife Lois, and two youngsters. He was advertising manager for the Holsum Baking Co.
At 1015 ½ M. L. Scoggins and his wife Margie. He worked for the Hydrocal Plant.
1956 At 1015 Aubrey D. Grayson, his wife Harriet, and two children. He was a truck driver.
At 1015 ½ resided Walter Z. Gaines, his wife Clara M., and four dependents. This was the Korean War period when the Harlingen Air Force Base was going full blast and Harlingen housing was tight. Walter was a S/Sgt. of the USAF.
1959 and 1960 At 1015 was Mrs. Selah Baker and one person under 18 years of age.
At 1015 ½ was William Manix and his wife Ruth. He was a rate clerk for the Southern Pacific Railroad.
1961 At 1015 was Jack L. Cunningham, his wife Shirley, and three children. He was a radio announcer for KGBT TV.
1962 1015 was vacant while 1015 ½ was occupied by Frank B. Posey and his wife Mary. He operated Posey's Blueprint Co.
1965 At 1013, yet another number change by the post office and/or directory, was Darrell R. Frizell and his wife Louise. He was a farm worker, possibly for the Adams.
At 1013 ½ lived Earl B. Adams, son of Elijah Bert, and himself a farmer/rancher and his wife Dari Gail, a teacher. By 1969 they would have built a home and moved into it on HWY 107 between Combes and Santa Rosa.
1966 At a new 1013 address next door, Aubrey and Harriet Adams Grayson built a house. He was then assistant manager of the Harlingen Steam Laundry. They would one day be proprietors of Stacy Mitchell Cleaners on East Harrison.
At 1015 ½ resided Johnnie W. McAlister, who worked as an estimator for the Triangle Electric and Plumbing Company, and his wife Betsy L., who worked in the Credit Department at Sears, Roebuck & Company.
1971 At 1013 ½ Maxine Williams, a clerk for Suburban Casuals, Marilyn Williams, and a youngster.
1972 While listed in the March-compiled phone book at 1013 ½ Maxine Williams by the following March was residing on E. Washington.

It is believed that sometime in 1972 or 1973 the Hand-Adams house was demolished. The 1019 N. 1st Street ranch house was utilized by Elmer L. King and the widow he married, Ruth Eleanor Adams, until 1986. H L. Mangum was noted to be in the house in 1987. Deborah Ann Erck has been in the residence for at least the last three years.