

# Historic Mansfield Walking Tours



## 7. Old Mansfield High School Rock Gym 605 E. Broad "Old Rock Gym" 1937

Built as the gymnasium for the old Mansfield High School, this 1937 structure is the only known building constructed by the W.P.A. in the Mansfield area. President Roosevelt authorized the project and allowed \$18,238 for labor on the Gym and also two classrooms for Mansfield High School. The project employed 40 men, which was a huge boon to a town that was struggling through the Great Depression.

The attractive ochre sandstone came from Bisbee. The building has 18-inch solid masonry walls. The workmanship – by Luke Lynn, Bethel "Slim" Murray, Owen Metcalf and Ed Nelson – is excellent. The gymnasium is 55 by 80 feet. A 21 by 63 foot lunchroom is built directly above the gym and was reached by a four-foot stairway. When it was built, a 28-gauge tin was used as roofing material – the contractor claimed it would be "everlasting". As far as can be determined, the same roof had been on the Gym until 1986.

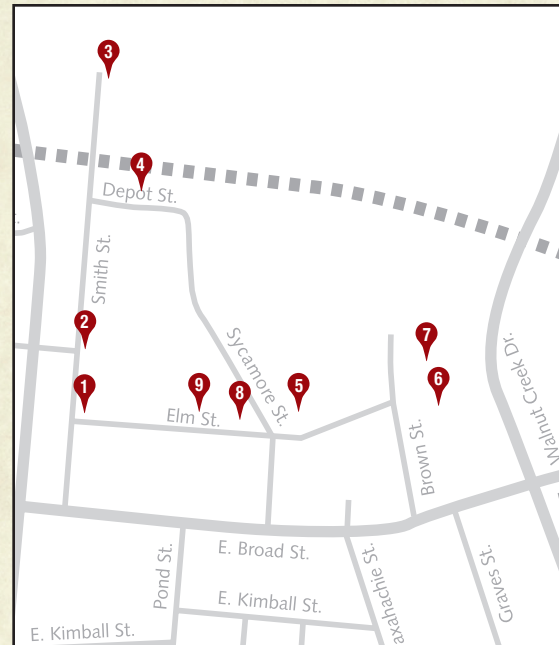
The last \$300 that was needed to build the Gym came from a fundraising rodeo that was held inside the nearly-completed structure. Everyone in town helped finish the building, and "The Old Rock Gym" stands as a memorial to the spirit of Mansfield and its proud heritage.

## 8. W.G. Ralston House c. 1900; c. 1915 309 E. Elm Street

This corner house was built by Byrd Hoover about 1900 for W.G. Ralston, the first depot agent in Mansfield, not far from the now demolished railroad depot. The house has been altered several times since about 1915, but still retains its varied roof lines and handsome corner porch. It is a highly visible contributor to the potential East Broad and East Elm Streets historic district.

## 9. Fowler-Boyd House c. 1900 305 E. Elm Street

Best known as the residence of Homer and Ethel Chorn Fowler-Boyd, this T-plan house with interlocking gable roofs and corner porch is a typical Tarrant County house type. It is a contributor to a potential historic district along E. Broad and E. Elm Streets.



## Mansfield Historical Museum and Heritage Center

102 N. Main  
Mansfield, TX 76063  
817.473.4250

Open Tuesday-Saturday 9-5  
[www.mansfieldhistory.org](http://www.mansfieldhistory.org)

*Historic Mansfield's  
Elm Street District*



## Self-Guided Walking Tour #3

*Welcome to Historic Mansfield! This self-guided walking tour will take you through the Elm Street District just east of the Central Business District. Featured in this area are remnants of the turn-of-the-century Mansfield Academy and the Old Rock Gym and Mansfield High School, as well as a variety of early homes. The tour takes approximately 1 hour.*

*All tours begin and end at the Mansfield Historical Museum and Heritage Center, 102 N. Main Street.*

*Please cross streets at marked intersections, for your safety. Also, use sidewalks, where available. If there is no sidewalk available, then please remember to “walk on the left, facing traffic”.*

## Let's Get Started!

***Out the door, left across Broad Street,  
up the hill and stop at the corner...***

### **1. Smith Street, from Broad to Depot**

Though it looks like an alley, Smith Street provided very important access to the railroad depot and also the cotton gin that was opened in the late 1800s by the C.A. Smith family. C.A. Smith and his wife came to Mansfield from Georgia after the Civil War. The cotton gin on what came to be called Smith Street was actually the second Smith gin. The first cotton gin in Mansfield was operated by the Smith family on their land on what is now Broad Street – on the grounds of present day Erma Nash Elementary School.

### **2. Pond Branch/Public Slaughter c. 1916**

This section of Pond Branch was the site for a thriving cold-weather business. Mr. Charlie Nichols and Mr. Joe Edgmon would “dress” hogs for the public. During particularly busy times, they would employ seven or eight extra men to help – on one very busy day, they prepared ninety fat swine for their customers.

### **3. Jacob M. Back House c. 1890; c. 1900; c. 1910 305 Smith Street**

A prominent landmark on the north edge of central Mansfield, this was the residence of Jacob and Alida Muncy Back and their descendants from about 1894 until the mid 1950s. Jacob Back was born in Tarrant County in 1861, the son of a pioneer who moved to Texas from Kentucky in the late 1840s and homesteaded on a 320-acre farm east of Mansfield. He was a dealer in cattle and hogs, and had several barns, pens, and wells on the 5-1/2 acre property. The Backs enlarged the original one-room house around 1900 and again around 1910. It was located near the railroad depot (now demolished) to facilitate the shipping of livestock. As an excellent example of the typical process by which folk houses grow over time, the Back House appears to be eligible for the National Register.

### **4. Depot/Blacksmith**

Trains started running through Mansfield in 1886, but it took the work and the fundraising of several of Mansfield's prominent citizens – J.H. Wright, Dr. Pitt M. House, A.J. Dukes and P.R. Beall – to be sure that it happened. The rail line was charted to go from Fort Worth to Waxahachie, but these four men raised a total of \$5000 to provide some right-of-way and other inducements to get the track right through their town. The train company was the Fort Worth and New Orleans Railway Company. It served the heavy freight needs of 30-40 local businesses and numerous cotton growers in these parts. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, railroads fought hard for tracks and rights-of-way, and the line between Mansfield and Waxahachie changed owners several times. At one time, this short line sold for about half a million dollars to the Houston & Texas Central. Passenger service along this line ended in the 1950s. Cotton farmers and their gins, as well as most other businesses, turned to trucks for more convenient service. The old depot has long been torn down, but there is still a Depot Street. You can still hear the whistle of the trains as they roll through town, echoing the ghosts of trains that have ridden these rails for almost 125 years.

### **5. Collier-McKnight c. 1870; 1911; 1952 401 E. Elm Street**

This beautiful home was built for Dr. John C. Collier in 1869 or 1870. Dr. Collier was the founder of the Mansfield Male and Female College. The second story was used as a girls' dormitory for the college until its closing in 1889. The house was then purchased by Mr. A.J. Dukes. It was subsequently purchased by Dr. W.B. McKnight in 1909. W.B. McKnight was a former student of the college, and he remodeled the home extensively in the Craftsman style. In 1944, The McKnights exchanged homes with Mr. and Mrs. T.E. Blessing, and this lovely home became the peaceful setting for a funeral parlor. Mr. and Mrs. Blessing both received their funeral director licenses in 1935. Mrs. Blessing received her embalmer license in May 1935. She is believed to be the first woman to receive an embalmer license in the State of Texas. The Collier-McKnight Home is still operated as a funeral home. The home was remodeled extensively in 1952, when the pedimented portico was added, using columns from a San Antonio house. This building, though severely altered, is significant for its association with Dr. Collier and the Mansfield Male and Female College.

### **6. Old Mansfield High School 1924 605 E. Broad**

Schools have stood on this site continuously since 1867, when the Mansfield Male and Female College, one of the first co-educational institutions in Texas, was founded by Dr. John C. Collier. The Mansfield Academy, which opened in 1901, was housed in a substantial two-story red-brick structure on this site. With the creation of the Mansfield Independent School District in 1909, the Academy building was purchased to house Mansfield's public school. In 1924, bonds were sold for construction of Mansfield High School.. A vote of 209 “for” and 24 “against” approved the construction of this brick building. This building was designed by W.G. Clarkson & Co. of Fort Worth, and it was built by James T. Taylor. It housed Mansfield's high school until 1963. The building is now home to the MISD Board of Trustees meeting room, and other offices. There is a beautiful mural on the interior wall.