

## Smith-McDowell House Chain of Title

- 1787 William Stewart
- 1796 Daniel Smith
- 1826 James M. Smith
- Ca. 1848--House Built
- 1856 John P. Smith
- 1860 William W. McDowell
- 1881 Alexander Garrett
- 1891 Robert Garrett
- 1898 Charles Van Bergen
- ca. 1900. Olmsted Jr. Designed Grounds
- 1908 Caroline E. Bates
- 1910 Henrietta B McKee
- 1913 Brewster Chapman
- 1920 Herman A. Gudger
- 1949 Wachovia Bank & Trust Co.
- 1951 Roman Catholic Diocese of Raleigh
- 1974 Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
- 1982 Museum Opened

**Emphasis of Tour 1840-1900.**

## Narrative Chain of Title

On 7 August 1787, North Carolina granted William Stewart, a veteran of the War for Independence (Revolutionary War), 640 acres. Stewart's property included and on the banks of the French Broad and Swannanoa Rivers. Part of this grant is the property where Smith-McDowell House is located. In 1796, Stewart sold 308 acres to Daniel Smith (b. 1757, d. 1824) for £100 (at that time, many people still used European currencies.)

Daniel Smith was born in New Jersey, had moved to North Carolina by 1776, and fought in the Revolution. In 1781, Smith married Mary McConnell Davidson of Burke County. Six years later, they helped to establish the first settlement on Bee Tree Creek. Smith, moving a little farther west, purchased land from Stewart, and built a log cabin on the east side of the French Broad River, on the ridge north of the confluence with the Swannanoa River. The Smiths were (among?) the first settlers in what is now Asheville.

In 1826, Daniel Smith's second son, James McConnell Smith (b. 1787, d. 1856) purchased 123 acres from his brother, also named Daniel. A portion of this land was part of the original grant to Stewart.

James Smith was an enterprising and thrifty man. He owned the Buck Hotel (located on what is now Broadway), a general store, farmland, a toll bridge over the French Broad River, a tanyard, and a gold mine in Georgia. The toll bridge and the store were the most profitable of Smith's business ventures.

James Smith was a large slaveholder, owning 66 slaves in 1850; he was the largest slaveowner in Buncombe County. We believe that some of his slaves helped build Smith-McDowell House, although no records of the house's construction exist. James' son, John (b. 1823, d. 1857), probably lived in the house and managed the surrounding farms. There is no record that James Smith ever used the house as his primary residence. When James died, he left the house and farm to John.

John owned the home for a year, until he died suddenly in 1857. John had never married, had no heirs and no will (intestate). In 1860, William Wallace McDowell was the highest bidder at a public estate auction, paying \$9600 for the house and 315 acres.

William McDowell (b. 1823, d. 1893) married James Smith's daughter, Sarah Lucinda Smith (b. 1825, d. 1905), in 1846. From 1851 to 1856, McDowell was a partner in Smith's store. McDowell had 10 children, of which 9 survived. McDowell also was a large slaveholder, owning 40 slaves. In 1859, McDowell helped organize a local militia unit, the Buncombe Riflemen. The Riflemen were the first unit to volunteer from western NC for the Confederate Army in 1861, just days after the fall of Fort Sumter, SC. 8 months after the volunteers left Asheville, McDowell was forced to return, suffering from chronic dysentery. McDowell lost most of his money when Confederate currency became worthless at the end of the war. McDowell sold off parcels of the land, and in 1881 McDowell was forced to sell the house.

Alexander Garrett (?-1895) bought the house from McDowell for \$11,000. He, his wife, Eliza, his son, Robert, Robert's wife, Mary, and Robert's daughter, Alexandra, all lived in the house. The Garretts moved from St. Louis, hoping that Asheville's climate would improve Mary Garrett's tuberculosis. By 1887, both Mary and Eliza had died, and Robert had remarried the children's governess, Adeline Gash. Alexander organized the town of Victoria, and served as its first mayor. In 1905, Victoria was annexed by Asheville. In 1891, ownership of the house was transferred to Robert.

In 1898, Dr. Charles Van Bergen bought the house from Robert Garrett for \$10,000. Van Bergen

moved to Asheville from Paris to treat tuberculosis patients. In 1899, he commissioned the Olmsted Brothers firm (Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.) to design a landscape plan for the house.

In 1908, Caroline Bates bought the house for \$14,250, and two years later transferred the title to her daughter, Henrietta McKee.

Brewster Chapman, a Canadian summer resident, and tuberculosis patient, bought the house in 1913. In 1915, the architectural firm Smith & Carrier (Richard Sharp Smith & Albert Heath Carrier) conducted renovations to the house.

At his death in 1920, Chapman left the house to Herman Gudger. At Gudger's death in 1949, Wachovia Bank & Trust held title, but the house was rented to Gudger's secretary, Elizabeth Nettles.

The Catholic Diocese of Raleigh purchased the house in 1951 for \$15,000, and used it as part of the parochial school.

In 1974, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College purchased the property to make room for a car park. The Western NC Historical Association and the Junior League of Asheville began efforts to save the property. The stables, walled gardens, pool, paddock, and orchard were destroyed, but the house and one outbuilding were saved. The Western North Carolina Historical Association began leasing the property in 1976, and the Museum first opened in 1982.