

# McCAMEY, TEXAS

*Photographs by John Lee Simons*

McCamey, Texas, is 52 miles south of Odessa and 47 miles northeast of Fort Stockton.

There are no trees in any direction for hundreds of miles. The closest towns, Iraan (named after the two people – Ira and Ann – who owned the land where oil was discovered) and Crane, are about 25 miles in opposite directions from McCamey, and like McCamey came to exist only when oil was discovered in the area in the twenties and thirties. Overnight McCamey became a town with no housing or materials within a 50-mile radius. In similar situations, tent cities usually formed quickly. In McCamey's case, along came Pansy Carpenter, an out-of-work tightrope walker.

Pansy got a kid's wagon and went all over the area collecting everything she could find – pieces of wood, tin, boxes, bottle caps, cans, parts of cars or trucks or rigs. It didn't matter what size. She put it all together to make houses and rooms that she rented out to oil workers. She made one-rooms out of stripped cars with wooden doors. She made porches on her houses, and trellises. Sometimes she would nail every nail through a bottle cap.

She cut tin so it was decorative for the outside and put curtains and floors in the inside.

Some houses were multi-roomed. They had single or communal outhouses. She eventually bought an old Ford and tied her wagons on the back and continued to go around town collecting. Toward the end of her life she always wore three dresses, one coat, three pairs of socks, and a hat when she went out. When she died, her car, with the wagons tied to the back, and everything she owned was put in the Mendoza Trail Museum in

McCamey. Over the years, all of the houses have been condemned or torn down. But in 1972, when these photographs were taken, at least 12 were still standing.

*Helen Fosdick*



