

Museum News: My Bucket List

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A few years ago, two books came out that, eventually, were made into movies. *The Bucket List* was about two men who made a list of things they wanted to do before they died, and *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* was about a man who dies and meets five people in the hereafter who made a serious impact on his life. This week I want to revisit some stories that I have done in the Museum News, and bring up some new facts about some people that I admire and want to look up when I arrive at the Pearly Gates.

One person I would like to meet is the "Father of Sanderson," Cyrus M. "Uncle Charlie" Wilson. I talked about Charlie in the October, 2011, issue of the *Museum News*. He was a strong willed and adventurous man who came to West Texas from Illinois after fighting in the Civil War, and spent the rest of his life creating a place he could call home.

Recently I discovered some new information about Charlie's final days. As I explained in the *News*, I discovered through articles in the El Paso newspapers that he had moved to the Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in Los Angeles, California, developed gangrene in one foot and had to have it amputated, and then died a few weeks later.

While revisiting Charlie's story, I found new information on the internet, his actual record at the Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, which is now a VA hospital in LA, and his final resting place, which became the Los Angeles National Cemetery.

Ms. Becky Sapp, owner of the Duchess of Hackberry house mentioned in an earlier article, resides in LA for most of the year, but comes out to visit her Sanderson home. She graciously agreed to go to the national cemetery and find Charlie's grave, and sent the photo that accompanies this article.

The most touching thing about Charlie's story was that he always wanted go to Cuba, and, indeed, the history book and earlier reporters of his story intimated that he had done just that when he left Sanderson after selling out in 1906.

But, according to his official records found on the internet, he moved from here to El Paso, and, as of the 1910 Federal Census, was an "inmate" of the Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in LA.

According to his admission/dismissal records, he came from El Paso prior to 1910 and spent the rest of his life at the Home, dying on August 25, 1912. Unfortunately, he had to spend at least two years as an "inmate" and never made it to Cuba.

And, for all the wheeling and dealing and profit-taking he had done in his life, the final record indicated that his estate was valued at \$2.30, little more than the change in his pocket and perhaps the liquidation of his personal items in the Home. He died a bachelor with no heirs, and only had a brother, who lived in Claytonville, Texas, who was also a bachelor with no heirs. It was a sad end for a very colorful character, a true adventurer and frontiersman in wild and wooly West Texas.

In March, 2012, I talked about Margaret Kloszner Savage, better known as Grandma Savage. She was quite a lady.

Grandma Savage came to Sanderson with her husband, J. W., a Fresno operator, who had graded the roadbed from San Antonio to track's end at the banks of the Pecos River when the railroad was built. He stayed on, working for the railroad as a section foreman in various places between here and Del Rio, finally settling in Sanderson in 1899 as a water pumper when the new pump house was finally built.

Grandma Savage was a kind, gracious lady who served as midwife, nurse and all-around right-hand "man" for the town's doctors. She delivered scores of babies and, several times, took the extremely dangerous job as nurse to the quarantine camps outside of town at the numerous outbreaks of small pox, typhoid and other extremely dangerous, infectious diseases.

In the article I spoke of her life and related stories that were passed down by friends and family. Amazingly, she once beat a wolf to death with a fireplace poker when it threatened her chickens! She was a crack shot with rifle and pistol, usually dispatching snakes and hawks with one shot.

She was spiritual adviser and mentor to many young mothers in town, and quite a few remarked that they could not have reared their families without Grandma Savage's help.

Recently, Mary Nell Higgins brought in some correspondence from David Duke, a classmate of hers who had kept in contact through the years. He loved to visit with Mrs. Savage, and once asked her about the Indians who straggled through Sanderson in those early years.

"Were the Indians bad when you first came to Sanderson?" he asked.

"No, Honey, they were *almost* human beings, at times. They would come on our back porch where I always had plenty of fresh honey and cold water. They would eat the honey, drink cold water and usually go on about their business. But, I was always behind a locked door with a loaded shotgun and a big dog by my side while the Indians were on the back porch! Usually, they would eat the honey and drink the cold water and leave, so I never had to kill any human beings." Tough lady!

David was good friends with Billy Savage, Margaret's son, and they had many adventures together through the years. His tales are very entertaining and I hope to share those in the future.

In December of 2012, I told the story of Pedro Castillo y Olivares, better known as "Tamale Pete."

Mr. Castillo was an iconic fixture in Sanderson for over sixty years. Selling his wares on the streets and at the depot from a small pushcart, and, always attired in his white waiter's coat, he was a shining example of self-reliance, to the disabled as well as to the able-bodied.

Injured in a horseback accident as a child in his native San Luis Potosí, México, his injuries never healed properly and he was left crippled for life. But, he was never disabled!

He couldn't do ranch work, so he came to the U. S. by way of Eagle Pass and made his way to Del Rio. He was "discovered" by local rancher Charles Downie, peddling loaves of bread on the street.

Mr. Downie offered him a job on the Downie Ranch. His employment as majordomo for the Downies extended for 14 years and he became a valued and beloved employee at the Downie Ranch headquarters.

Eventually, he married and moved to town, running three different restaurants, at times. He spent his remaining days selling his homemade tamales.

Castillo never accepted a handout from anyone. He made a fair living and supported his wife until she passed. At age 68, he remarried and adopted two of his new wife's relatives. I am near that age and I don't believe I have the stamina to raise two small children, let alone find a new wife. (Don't worry, I am not done with this one, yet!)

Recently, at a jury call, I was visiting with some men who had known Tamale Pete. They remarked that his tamales were always loaded with meat. The "masa," they said, was expensive, but the meat wasn't, so he loaded them with extra meat. I hope he is up there laying in a good stock of tamales right now, because I surely would like to try them when I get there. And, more importantly, I would like to make the acquaintance of this very fine gentleman and many other former residents who have gone to their reward.

(All *Museum News* newsletters are available at the museum web site, <http://www.terrellmuseum.info/newsletters>)



Cyrus M. "Uncle Charlie" Wilson



Margaret "Grandma" Savage



Pedro "Tamale Pete" Castillo

