

Museum News: Jim and Gertrude Haley

by C. W. (Bill) Smith

Jim Haley was a long-time resident of Terrell County, ranching in several areas and working for quite a few ranchers. He also was a trapper and worked over a good part of the Big Bend. He came to Terrell County shortly after it was organized and spent most of his life here.

Jim came from a large family. Al Haley and his wife Betty had twelve children, seven sons and five daughters. They were Will, George, Horton, Lee, Jim, Benton, Jess, Pearl, Eunice, Nora, Lola, and Louie.

James Lemuel Haley moved to Sanderson in 1907 to work on ranches and break horses. About 1908 he married Gertrude Musgrave, sister of Maggie Banner, wife of Will Banner. When Gertrude's mother died, she went to live with the Banners. She was also a sister of Maude Farley, wife of Dan Farley, Dryden pioneer settlers.

Jim got a job with the railroad as a car inspector, and at that time, their first two children, Gladys and Irene, were born at Sanderson. But when the railroad workers went on strike they were fired and the family had to move to Big Spring where Jim got a job working for the Texas Pacific Railroad.

After being away from family and missing the country, they moved back to Sanderson in a covered wagon. They ranched and lived north of Dryden. Daughter Irene remembered that the place was infested with rattlesnakes, and that her mother once killed a rattlesnake under the bench where the kids sat at the table.

When Gladys started to school in 1916, the Haleys decided to move to Sanderson to make their home. During this time Jim found work as a bartender at the Hunter Saloon, which had been Charlie Wilson's old Cottage Bar Saloon.

After 1918, work became scarce and they moved back to Big Spring and eventually to Slaton, trying to find any kind of work. It was here that Jim worked in the fields as a harvest hand. Not being very successful, they decided to move back to Terrell County to be close to family which had relocated to the area.

In 1923 they moved back and ranched on Maxon Creek, west of Sanderson. They also ranched on the McClain place and moved eventually to the Kerr Ranch, which had only recently been a family partnership of Jim, Jess and Horton Haley. Tragically, Gertrude died at the young age of 37 in 1929 while living on the Kerr place. She had traveled to her brother's funeral and on the way home contracted a fatal case of pneumonia. After Gertrude's death Jim worked on several ranches and trapped for a living, while raising his children.

Jim and Gertrude were blessed with five children: Gladys,



Jim Haley and his wife, Gertrude, shortly after they married in 1908 at Sanderson. Photo: Terrell County Museum



Jim Haley in later years with a panther killed on a local ranch, about 1962. Photo: TC Museum

Irene, James, Dub and Lorraine. Gladys married Earl Henning and had fourteen children: Thomas Earl, Helen Jo, Earlene, Clarence, Fred, Charles, Jack, Margaret Jean, Edwin, Brenda, Clyde, Jimmie and Ray Wallace; Irene married Paul Ritter but never had children; James married Inez Hall and had four children; James, Clyde, Robert and Mary Elizabeth; Dub married Della Kimball and had two children; Mary Gertrude and Allen; and Lorraine married Bill Haynes and had five children: Sue Vaun, Haley Alton, Glenn, Dennis and Jo Lynn.

In 1965, at the age of 81, poor health forced Jim to move to Refugio to live with his son, but he passed away shortly after arriving. He was buried at Gertrude's side at Cedar Grove Cemetery in Sanderson.

Jim lived a long and full life of railroading, ranching, cowboying and trapping, which extended to his children as well. His kids lived a very idyllic life in the country, which gave them wonderful memories. Irene wrote a very touching family entry for the Terrell County history book, "Terrell County Its Past Its People," compiled by Alice Evans Downie (Anchor Press, San Angelo, TX, 1978.) Here is a section from the end of her entry:

"I will always remember my first sight of Sanderson (1923,) as we drove into town from the east upon our return from Big Spring. I was eleven years old. To me, it was the most beautiful place in the world. The old pumphouse on the hill was chugging away. The town lay in peace and quiet, the hills surrounding it. I remember the life on Maxon Creek, especially when heavy rains, up country, brought the creek down. One could hear the roaring of the water long before it came rolling down the creek bed, a monstrous wall of water. Unless you have seen it, you can't believe it. I remember the natural swimming holes in San Francisco Creek; the large juicy Pitaya cactus fruit, better than any man-grown fruit; the fishing trips to the Rio Grande; and the nice trips to the Banner Ranch on the Pecos.

"I recall the big pot of frijoles on the wood stove each day, hot biscuits and milk gravy for breakfast; crisp brown cornbread for dinner and supper; beef jerky, thin slices of meat heavily salted and peppered and hung on the line to dry black in the hot Texas sun.

"We had no refrigeration, so our food was kept in a cooler: a tin pan on the top and bottom, with shelves in between. The top pan was smaller than the bottom pan and with water in the top pan, burlap curtains from top to bottom carried the water down, which, with our Texas breeze, kept the food cool.

"We hauled water in kegs on burros — by pack saddle, and dug mesquite roots for fuel. No water was in the house, and we had no bathroom. We really roughed it and loved it. Of course, (we had) no electricity, only kerosene lamps. But the most wonderful thing of all - - (was) the peace and privacy. And to top the list, (was) the kindness and caring of the Terrell County people."

Some things never change.