

Museum News: Ed McGinley – Entrepreneur of Sanderson

by C. W. (Bill) Smith

If Uncle Charlie Wilson was the father of Sanderson, Ed McGinley was the nanny who shepherded it in the 20th century and made a modern city from a wild backwater.

On a steamy morning in August of 1906, Cyrus M. "Uncle Charlie" Wilson met Edward McGinley at the Terrell Hotel, temporary home of the county offices, to sign over the deeds to 90% of his holdings in Sanderson and Terrell County. The deal included Wilson's home and furniture, the town wells and water wagon, the two-storey wood and adobe Terrell Hotel, and a large adobe building to the north that housed the cafe. In addition McGinley got the barber shop, a railroad men's bunkhouse, and many rent houses and vacant lots.

But just who was Ed McGinley? He and his family had only moved to Sanderson a few months before, and now he owned most of it!

Edward McGinley's story was a typical 19th Century success story. Born in Donegal, County Cork, Ireland, in 1870, he suffered an early loss in the death of his mother, Nora. Father James soon remarried and as often was the case, young Edward left home soon thereafter and immigrated to Philadelphia to live with an uncle. Always a hard worker, Edward soon had enough money to send for his sister, Bridget, and bring her to America. They settled in El Paso, along with a young Irish compatriot, Charles Gillespie, and soon, Charles and Bridget were wed. The brothers-in-law landed jobs with the GH&SA/Southern Pacific Railroad and thus began a life-long career in railroading.

Starting as a fireman in the 1890s, Ed quickly rose to engineer, spending his career working in an out of Sanderson. In 1898 he was working to the east of Sanderson and happened to meet beautiful young Ida Wolfram in San Antonio. Soon they were married and he took his new bride to El Paso.

In 1906 and with his wife great with child, they moved to Sanderson to make their new home. Always an entrepreneur, Ed soon made a deal with Charlie Wilson to buy most of his holdings in Terrell County.

Charlie was growing older and health issues were becoming a problem. In 1910 he bode farewell and intended to go to Cuba, with a stopover in California. He never made it to Cuba, passing away in 1912 from health issues.

But back in 1906, Ed McGinley took a one-year leave of absence from the railroad to get his new acquisition into shape. They soon moved into Charlie's completely furnished house, which once sat on the corner of Wilson and Oak and Ed began his plan to upgrade the community.

First, Ida took over operation of the Terrell Hotel, but left the restaurant in the hands of Sam Lum, a Chinese who had run it for years. Then, the McGinleys hired the F. B. Carters to run the whole operation.

Ed got a 30-year franchise from the county to provide water to the town. Charlie Wilson had sold water by the barrel from his well, delivered by young Fred Savage on his burro. Later, Wilson bought a tanker wagon and Juan Nuñez filled barrels at the homes.

Ed McGinley drilled a second well and brought in huge machinery parts which he assembled himself to pump the water up to a new stone storage tank, high on Javelina Hill, which still exists today. He assembled water pipes from redwood boards that were strapped together to form the first water mains in town. People were shocked to have water piped directly to their homes, and even inside, too!

Over the next few years he also set up a light plant to provide electricity to the little town, almost unheard of in even larger places in West Texas in that period.

Along with his own projects, he also served as a general contractor for several new buildings in Sanderson. The Sanderson State Bank building on Persimmon was one such building, built in 1909. He also contracted the building of the Bogusch Jewelry Store, the two-storey red brick building just north of the Terrell County Tax Office, and is thought to be the contractor of the Kerr Hotel, long ago demolished in a catastrophic fire.

By 1912 the McGinleys had four children so they moved to a larger home that sat on the corner of School and Oak, site of the present-day Sanderson Bank. Life was good for the McGinleys. They owned one of the first automobiles in Sanderson. Bought in 1910, it was an EMF-30, forerunner of the Studebaker.



Ed and Ida Wolfram McGinley

Faithful Roman Catholics, the McGinleys donated to the property and lumber fund for the construction of the first Catholic Church in Sanderson, the Immaculate Conception Church, located on Oak Street between 2nd and 3rd. It was also at their urging, along with the Kerrs, Kuykendalls and Hispanic families, that the first permanent priest was brought to Sanderson for service.

In 1912, Ed was transferred to Del Rio and he had to move his family to that city. Afterwards they built a home in San Antonio and they moved for the last time.

Ed's interest in Sanderson, however, had not waned. In 1912 he built a railroad bunk house across the street from the present Sanderson Bank. But there was a problem. The first excavation for foundations ran into coffins and human remains. Apparently one of the first cemeteries for Sanderson had been placed in the same location. Ed had to petition the county to have the remains removed to the present Cedar Grove Cemetery, known as Evergreen Cemetery in those days.

Ed McGinley's resulting structure served railroaders up into the 1980s, but apparently he did not get all of the remains removed. Years later workers turned up more coffin parts and human bones on the same lot.

But with his family living elsewhere, Ed decided it was time to dispose of his properties in Sanderson. He began to advertise in area papers in 1914, seeking to sell his complete holdings in Terrell County. He continued to promote and improve "his" town, but in 1917, he made a deal with Joe Kerr to buy everything he owned.

After the sale of his properties, Ed took up residence in his new home in San Antonio, spending the last 30 years of his life in relative ease. He passed away of heart disease in that city in September of 1947.

Two great Irishmen built and improved Sanderson...Charlie Wilson and Ed McGinley. Now the torch passed to a third Irishman, Joe Kerr, who brought the town to financial flower and success.