

Museum News: The Pink Silk Gown

by C. W. (Bill) Smith

There are many reasons to love your community...the climate may be excellent, the scenery breathtaking, your home may be just to your liking, the schools great, the cost of living low...all these things might be likely candidates. But for me it is the people themselves.

Sure, we fuss and fume, squabble and pick fights, like all brothers and sisters do at times. And sometimes it seems everybody you meet has gotten up on the wrong side of the bed that morning!

But in Sanderson, when the chips are down, a whole host of friends and neighbors will come to your aid. All petty concerns are forgotten (for the most part) and it seems people you don't even know will offer to help. And Sanderson has been that way from the beginning.

In the December 12, 1930 edition of the *Sanderson Times* is the report of an accident at Emerson, which was a stop on the railroad about eight miles west of Sanderson. A young couple and their little daughter were on a trip to Ft. Davis, and when they came through Comstock they found a young, pretty brunette, Doris Sybil Lout, walking by the side of the road. They stopped and insisted that she ride with them...the open road at night was not a place for a young sixteen year-old girl, all alone. When they arrived in Sanderson they bought gas at the Loma Alta Service Station and went on their way.

Just outside of Emerson, however, the car left the road, overturned and the little girl was killed instantly. Young Doris, too, was severely injured and life quickly slipped away before help could arrive.

Sheriff Cook, Constable Landers and Justice of the Peace Gates were notified and raced to the scene with all haste. A formal inquest ruled the deaths an accident and W. E. Stirman, the local undertaker, brought the bodies to his establishment in Sanderson.

A few days passed while the authorities made every effort to contact the young woman's relatives. They found a sister and an aunt, but could not locate her mother; disposition of the body could not be made.

Meanwhile, news of the tragic circumstances spread through the community and a group of Sanderson women took it upon themselves to make a beautiful pink silk gown for the young woman, fitting for her eternal rest. The embalmer, Mr. Doran from Del Rio, took especially good care in preparing the body and by all accounts her final repose was hauntingly beautiful.

After some days and with no family coming forward to claim the remains, the decision was made to bury Doris in Evergreen Cemetery, the predecessor to Cedar Grove. But it was not to be a small ceremony with few in attendance. As evidenced by the thoughtfulness of the ladies of Sanderson in creating the lovely pink gown for burial, the *Times* reported that at the appointed hour, a large group of Sanderson folks followed the funeral cortege to the cemetery, gathered about the grave and paid their respects as she was lovingly laid to rest. And as a further act of kindness and respect for someone they did not even know, the grave was piled high with beautiful floral offerings.

Yes, there are many reasons to love your community, but most of those things are physical or temporal and may pass in time.

But the timeless reality of Sanderson is her spirit...a great sense of responsibility for the destitute and the bereft, for those in distress. And this community's care and love for ones who are in need still exists, just waiting for an opportunity to express itself.

