

Museum News: Tex Mooney – Movie Star!

By C. W. (Bill) Smith

Sometimes the tales out of Terrell County are the “stuff dreams are made of.” How many times do we dismiss a youngster’s wild dream of playing pro football or acting in the movies as just an unrealistic, childish flight of fancy? Yet, Oran T. Schupbach, Jr., from little ol’ Sanderson, Texas, did both of those things.

Always big for his age, Oran, son of O. T. “Pard” Schupbach, Sr., was raised on a ranch in southwestern Terrell County. By age nine he already looked like a grown man! Other early photos show him standing not just head and shoulders, but head and chest above his peers!

Oran’s father, Pard, came to Terrell County from Del Rio in 1899. He married Dixie Bowden in Alpine. Daughter Maybelle was born in 1915, and Oran T., Jr., came along in 1917, born at his grandmother’s house in El Paso. After a short recuperation, the Schupbachs brought their new son home to the ranch on San Francisco Creek.

Raised as a typical rancher’s son, Oran learned how to take care of animals and do his chores, but his dream was professional sports. He went to high school in both Sanderson and Abilene, a stand-out in football and basketball, and graduated from Sanderson High School in 1936.

He attended Sul Ross State College and transferred during his junior year to West Texas State, where he was a member of the so-called “World’s Tallest Basketball Team,” and was a stand-out on the football team.

Oran’s high school and collegiate record and skill, plus his size and weight, landed him a position with the Cleveland Rams team for 1942-43. He played one season for them, and then he moved on to the Brooklyn Dodgers for the ‘43-’44 season.

Meanwhile, someone put the acting bug into his head and he went to Hollywood in 1943. He changed his name to Tex Mooney and tried out for and won a bit role in a movie, 1944’s **Girl Rush**. Oran found the movie business was a lot easier on the body than smashing heads together on the football field, so he gave up his football career to be a movie star.

His career looked promising, and for the next four years the bit roles came, but he never achieved star status.

In 1948, he finally got his first, credited role in the Johnny Weissmuller vehicle, **Jungle Jim**, where he chewed the scenery as Chief Devil Doctor, in blackface and white paint, no less.

When, the movie work dried up Tex was forced to find work elsewhere. He had worked part-time as a bouncer to make ends meet, so it seemed to make good sense to pursue that career. He soon landed a full-time job as a bouncer in a Hollywood night club, and it became the easiest role of his life.

Tex found that his immense size and weight put “the fear of God” in all but the most fool-hardy of night club patrons. Just his presence alone on the dance floor kept the peace, and when he had to deal with a problem, he developed techniques that stopped the trouble before it could begin. He found that he could move quickly to an offending patron and send him sprawling to the floor with a forceful “belly-bump.” Dazed, and with the wind knocked out of him, the unruly troublemaker was neutralized and could be dealt with easily and quickly.



In another bouncer technique, the legendary “bum’s rush,” Tex would grab the miscreant by the collar and the seat of the pants, lift him from the floor and carry him to the exit, as portrayed in the lead photo on page one. His upper body strength must have been extraordinary.

In a *Saturday Evening Post* article on the bouncer trade, written in 1948, Tex Mooney was named as the author’s favorite bouncer, and the first six paragraphs were dedicated to his views and anecdotes on the life of a bouncer.

In the article, Tex bemoaned the fact that times were changing for the bouncer. He related that the bouncer was forced to use psychological tricks rather than physical persuasion in the new, post-war world.

He remembered that one of his toughest episodes involved four Canadian sailors and a girl they had picked up on the street.

Tex’s night club had a rule forbidding women wearing slacks. Of course the young lady in question was wearing slacks.

When informed at the front door of the club policy, the young lady said, “That’s no problem,” and proceeded to strip the slacks off, right on the street, and tossed them to one of her companions, who promptly stuffed them into his hat, and the party pushed their way into the club.

At this point, Tex had to intervene. As he put it, “The dame's wearing a long coat, but every step she's taking she's showing a lot of acreage. About twenty sailors beat me to her, and when I first eased up, it was kind of a tedious spot. I had to read off four sailors before I could talk to her (in) private. When the cops took her away, the sailors got all upset so then we had to oblige them. Nothing rough, because they were our allies. But enough to let 'em know who was runnin' this joint.”

In 1954, Tex won another movie role, this time in the epic **East of Eden**, starring James Dean. He had a small role as a bartender, but it did not earn him a place in the end credits. The movie came out in 1955, and was his last role.

On May 19, 1956, O. T. “Tex Mooney” Schupbach died suddenly of undisclosed causes in Riverside, California. He was only 39 years old.

Most people only dream about their life goals, being forced back to reality by lack of opportunity and practicality. Tex Mooney, through talent, skill, the right physical attributes and providence, realized his childhood dreams. Even though he did not achieve sports hero or matinee idol status, nevertheless, he had modest success and lived the life he wanted, on his own terms. In his short life, he achieved what others only dream of, and it all started in this West Texas town we call home.