

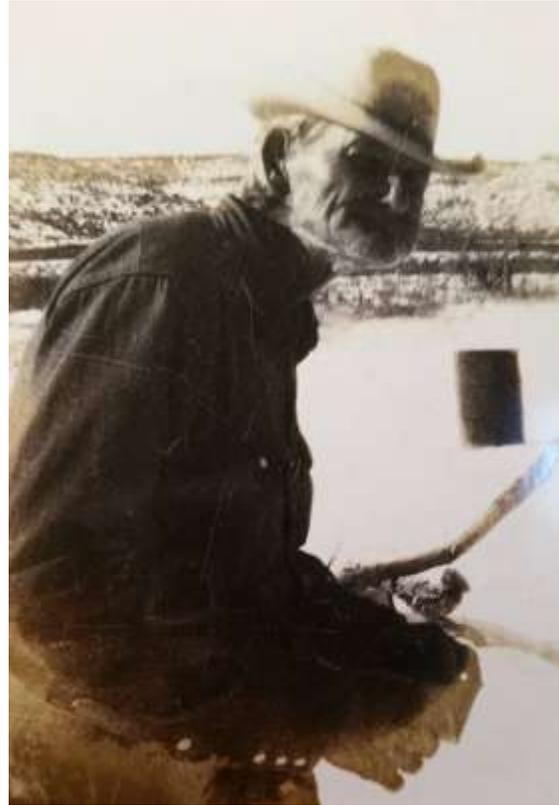
Museum News: Woody Rutledge

By C. W. (Bill) Smith

George Greenwood “Woody” Rutledge was a colorful character and long-time resident of Dryden, Texas. A tall, thin man, he seemed like a giant to young children, but his peaceful demeanor made children love him almost immediately. He was a hard worker and one of the most honest men you would ever meet. For long years he worked diligently and thoroughly and built a solid reputation with his neighbors.

Woody’s family background is interesting. The Rutledge family originated from a place called Routledge located on the English-Scottish border, and the word itself is derived from Old English words meaning “red pool or stream.” His Grandmother’s Stidham family emigrated from Sweden in the 17th Century, although her ancestry is Danish. They all eventually settled in Alabama and emigrated from there to Texas.

His grandparents, George Washington and Mary Stidham Rutledge raised a family of eight in the Poteet area, but moved to Terrell County around 1900 to ranch. Woody’s father, Ira, was one of the oldest children and stayed at home to help his father ranch until he married at age 36 to Katie Johnson. From that union four children were born: Woody, Millard, Nealie and Rosalie. They lived for a while in Brewster County at Haymond but eventually returned to ranch at Dryden. His parents are buried at Cedar Grove Cemetery in Sanderson, but he had a number of relatives buried at the cemetery in Marathon where many of his family settled.



Woody’s life was one of hard work in the country. He never learned to read and write but he had a big heart and trusted folks to do the right thing when it came time to pay him for work he had done. For Many years he cleaned yards, dug post holes (at 25¢ per hole), made fence, trapped, dug cattle guards and dug septic tanks in Sanderson, all with a pick, shovel and crowbar, after walking from his home in Dryden twenty miles away to the job. In the evenings he would walk back home unless someone gave him a ride. In later years he acquired a three-wheel bicycle and rode to and from Dryden to work.

Woody knew his limitations. Once, while digging out rocks at a barn in Sanderson, he told a group of boys, “I have a strong back, but a weak mind. You boys stay in school.” It was a lesson that stuck with them.

Even Woody, however beloved and liked by most people, had his problems. On one trip to Sanderson he was held up, robbed and beaten at gun point. From that point, he strapped on a huge pistol for his protection.

Another time he had cooked a pot roast in his little house on the hill at Dryden and decided that he needed pickles and bread from the store at the bottom of the hill. He was only gone for a few minutes but when he got back the roast and the pan were missing. The infamous Cave Bandit who shot Sheriff Cooksey had robbed him of his evening meal, and Woody was outraged that anyone would do that to him.

Little episodes like that occurred from time to time, but a more general problem for Woody was that he could neither read nor write and had trouble counting money. The local legend was that he went only one day to first grade, and then was kept home by his parents to work on the ranch. When making purchases at local stores he would lay his money out on the counter and allow the clerk to count out what they needed. He was a very good-hearted, trusting soul. One gentleman tried to teach him how to take care of his money, but it was a difficult concept for Woody.

Woody was born on 27 August 1915 in Poteet, Texas, to Ira and Katie Rutledge. He was the oldest child and had a younger brother, Millard, and two sisters, Nealie and Rosalie. An early tragedy in his life was the loss of his little brother Millard in World War II, killed in action on June 9, 1944 in Haute-Normandie, France. He is buried at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial in Colleville-sur-Mer, Calvados, France. He was a member of the 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, U. S. Army, and he was awarded the Purple Heart, posthumously.

His sister, Nealie Rutledge Dott, passed away in Floresville, Texas in 2001 and is buried there. She was married to Roman Frank Dott and he also has passed. They had three boys, Jack, Millard and Jimmy, and Jack and Jimmy are deceased. Rosalie married Carroll Simpson Holmes and lives in the Dallas area. Her husband passed away in 1990, a World War II veteran of the U. S. Navy. They had two children, Freda and Bobby.

As for Woody, he led the life of a bachelor. He did not appear to have any type of romantic relationship or interest, even though some genealogy sites reported that he was married, this is a distinct error for those who actually knew him. His was a solitary life of hard work but probably not too much loneliness, for Woody had friends in every corner of Terrell County. He was a quiet man with good manners and a perfect gentleman around ladies and youngsters. It was a good life.

One of the ironies of a good life, however, is that good people often pass away and not much notice is given to their passing. As Woody's health began to fail he went to live with his sister in Floresville, Texas. He died on April 8, 1990, and is buried in the Floresville Cemetery in his sister's family plot.

So, as legends often do, they pass into eternity, not leaving behind much of a footstep on the earth they trod. But in Woody Rutledge's case, he left a large and deep impression in the hearts of those who knew him, who worked with him and who really loved him.