

Museum News: Ruel Adams – County Clerk

By C. W. (Bill) Smith

Arthur Ruel Adams was the second son, born on July 1, 1899 in Polk County, Texas to Charles Augustus and Mary Ruth Locke Adams, but moved to a farm outside of Dublin, Erath County, Texas at an early age. Then the family moved outside Robert Lee, Coke County, Texas where they lived on a farm and his remaining siblings were born.

In 1912, the family moved to a ranch south of Alpine, Texas, near Study Butte and Terlingua in southern Brewster County, Texas. The trip to Alpine in 1912 was not easy. The large family used a covered wagon and several hacks to move their belongings, as well as driving livestock and horses. Mrs. Adams and the small children went by hack, and Ruel and his brother Dom drove another hack loaded with chickens, which kept them fed for the entire trip. Mr. Adams drove the wagon loaded with their belongings. The trip took two weeks during a cold month of March and the weather was grueling. When they finally arrived at their place in Brewster County a West Texas sandstorm blew in for days and the children hated their new home. They wanted to go back to Coke County and the cozy farm, but the Adams stuck it out and the family grew to love the desert.



Ruel and Ruth Adams

Ruel had three brothers, Almer (Charlie,) Dom and John, and three sisters, Ruth, Annie and Lois (Pat.) The children all went to school at Alpine but lived on the ranch in the summers. Tragically, 13 year-old Ruth contracted typhoid fever in 1915 and died, which was a very common occurrence in those days.

After World War I, their oldest brother, Charlie, returned home from Europe and was riding home from the war in a boxcar (allowed by the government to veterans) but was accosted in Kansas by a railroad detective and ordered to leave the train. When he stood for his rights accorded by the government, the detective drew his revolver and shot the unarmed Charlie, dead on the spot. The detective was convicted of murder and sent to prison, and for years afterwards when his parole hearing came up, Mr. Adams or one of the family members made the trip to Kansas to testify against his release. They succeeded in keeping him in prison for many years.

Ruel graduated from high school in 1918 and went to work for his father on the ranch at Study Butte. He became a very good cowboy and loved to ride horses, break them and drive cattle. Being so far from the railroad livestock had to be driven under herd to the stock pens in Marathon or Alpine, a distance of 70 miles to either location. He loved the trip, hearkening back to an earlier age in Texas history.

In 1923 he was offered and took a job with the Chisos Mining Company at Terlingua, which was operating a large mercury mine and refining operation. He drove a supply truck and brought goods and the mail from Alpine to the miners and to the company store in Terlingua and a trading post at Castolon, a tiny community in the present Big Bend National Park. The trip was over eighty miles with nothing more than a cow trail to follow, and another 14 miles down to Castolon. In dry weather there was not much problem, but rainy weather made it a necessity to carry mud chains to get through the creeks and streams that sprang up. He was a good driver, though, and enjoyed this job.

About 1925 he was offered a position working in the company store in Terlingua and he was happy to get off the road. Being a hard working man he attracted the attention of two brothers who ran a store in Sanderson, Texas, Joe and Jim Kerr. In June of 1927 Jim Kerr offered him a job and he removed himself to Sanderson and began a long career at Kerr Mercantile.

In July of 1927 he married Miss Sallie Freeman and they started a new life together in Sanderson. The marriage was short-lived, however

In December of 1939 Ruel married his second wife, Ruth, and they lived happily for the rest of her life until she

passed in 1974. Ruth brought with her a daughter, Marjorie, who eventually married W. T. Frazier, Jr. Ruel worked for Kerr Mercantile alongside his brother-in-law, Ed Babb, Annie's husband. They had moved to Sanderson to work at Kerrs about the same time.

In 1946 he resigned at Kerrs, having been elected as County and District Clerk of Terrell County. He took office in January of 1947. Ruel made a good County Clerk, and as with his other positions during life he enjoyed himself. Workers in the clerk's office related that he would take a nap in the records vault every afternoon, stretched out on top of the file cabinets. He served as County and District Clerk for 30 years, but did not run again for office after Ruth passed away.

Ruel third marriage was to Verna Wall, a widow from South Carolina. Verna was Ruth's niece. Ruth's mother had died in 1914 when Ruth was just eight years old. In 1920 when she was 14 she and her father went to live with her sister, Ethel Belger Wall, who took them in and raised her. Her niece, Verna was just six years younger. Ruth and Ruel visited family in South Carolina on a regular basis and after the death of Ruth and the death of Verna's husband, a romantic attraction occurred and they married.

When he was finally free of the Clerk's Office, Ruel and Verna moved to South Carolina to be near her family. It was in South Carolina that Ruel Adams passed away in August of 1984. He was brought back to Texas and interred at Ruth's side in the Alpine Cemetery, along with his sister Ruth, brothers Charlie and Dom and his parents.