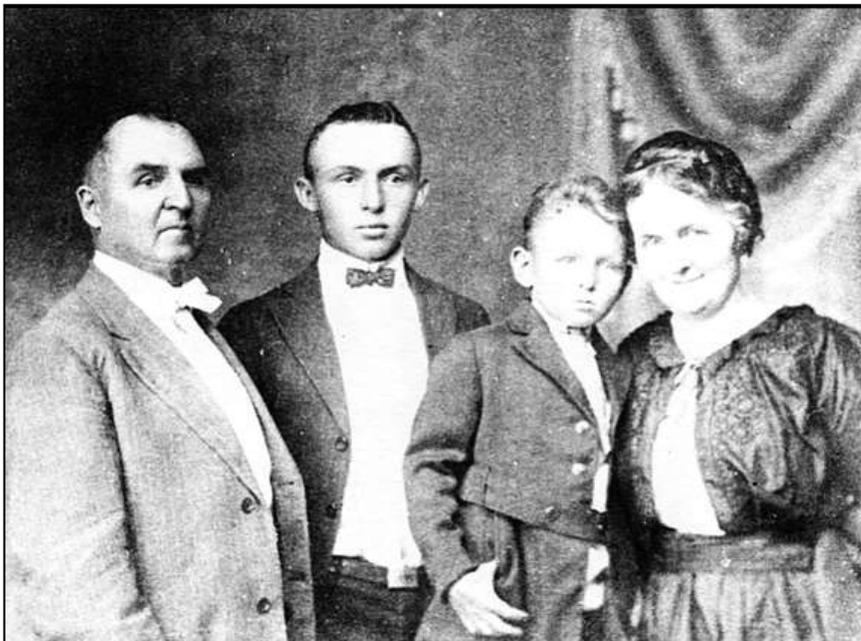


## Museum News: Big Shorty and Little Shorty - The Robertson Family

By C. W. (Bill) Smith

The W. H. Lemons family figured prominently in the history of Terrell County. First County Clerk of the new county, railroad man, abstract office owner and rancher, Will Lemons raised his seven children at 2<sup>nd</sup> and Mansfield in Sanderson. His wife, Luella, was the second County Clerk, appointed and reelected after Mr. Lemons died in the flu epidemic in 1919. His children were Addie, Grace, Lewis, Ora, Elouise, Lolette and W. H., Jr. The elder generations have all passed away now, leaving only grandchildren and great grandchildren. All of this was to lay the groundwork for another family which married into the Lemons family, the Robertsons.

Dr. P. F. Robertson and his wife, Dannie Anna McNemar Robertson, moved to Sanderson in 1919 to take up residence and replace Dr. F. W. Reeve, who had died with many other Sanderson residents in the flu epidemic. It was a terrible and heart-breaking time for the town when prominent people and



*Dr. P. F. Robertson, Frank "Big Shorty", Charles "Little Shorty" and Mrs. Dannie Robertson, 1920.*

common people alike were struck down by the Spanish flu. The graveyards of West Texas, indeed, the whole of the U. S., have an unusual number of graves from 1918-1919, all due to the epidemic.

Dr. Robertson was at least the eighth doctor to move to Sanderson. The other doctor at the time was a Dr. D. A. Harrison, and two physicians were necessary to cover the whole area, not just Sanderson. Dr. Robertson was immediately appointed as the County Health Officer and the railroad physician, which meant he had to travel up and down the line from Del Rio to Alpine taking care of railroad men and regular citizens. If he was needed along the railroad he was picked up by train crews and rode in the caboose or on a passenger train to care for the sick or injured. For ranch calls he took a hack or buggy or went by horseback. It was a far cry from today when very few doctors make house calls.

The Robertsons had three children...Faye, 20, who soon got a job with the U. S. government in Washington, D. C....and two boys, Robert, 15, and Charles, 11, nicknamed "Big Shorty" and "Little Shorty." The boys were popular, as were the elder Robertsons, and they all fit in very quickly at Sanderson. Dr. Robertson united with the Masonic lodge and was very active. He was also a charter member of the first Chamber of Commerce in Sanderson in 1920. His family joined the Presbyterian Church and he became an elder. Mrs. Robertson was involved in Eastern Star and the Presbyterian Women's Auxiliary. She was also a member of sewing circles in town and the contract bridge club, which was the rage of that period.

Traveling so much in the country, Dr. Robertson became interested in ranching and soon purchased the Shorty Ganin ranch, east of Sanderson. He made major improvements, including the drilling of the first water well brought in south of today's Highway 90, and had the ranch fenced. At the time, all country south of the railroad was open country inundated with wolves, mountain lions, coyotes and other predators. He hired a trapper to take the predators and began to get control of the land. Other ranchers near him were Frank Harrell, "Pard" Schupbach, Joe Nichols, "Big Boy" Shelton, the Stansells, part of the Downie and other owners located closer to the Rio Grande.

In 1927 Robertson sold this property to John Carruthers and bought three sections of property close to the Cochran place just east of town. He made improvements there, as well, including securing water from the railroad pump houses and building fences.

In 1930 Dr. Robertson was making a house call to a ranch north of Dryden and lost control of his automobile. In the wreck

he was seriously injured. He recovered, but never fully and was forced to retire in 1932. In 1940 he passed away and in 1951 Mrs. Robertson passed away and they are both interred at Cedar Grove Cemetery.

The Robertson boys led an idyllic country life, and baseball was their biggest interest. Big Shorty, Frank, was an especially talented shortstop, and Sanderson of that age was the right place to be if you wanted to pursue a career in baseball. The town had a minor league team and Mr. Willie Banner was a scout for the St. Louis Cardinals. With a good ball park, located near the American Legion ball parks of today, a two-hundred seat grandstand was set up about where today's Dairy King sits.

Carlton White, husband of Elouise Lemons White and owner of the Princess Theater, reminisced in the Terrell County history book about an excellent team they had in the late 1920s. That line-up consisted of: Pitchers: Leonard Maddux, Cecil Hutto, Andy Anderson, Zeke Cavender. Catchers: Shelly Barnes, Stump Duke, L. Barbee, Harold Dodd. First base, Carlton White; second base, Shorty Robertson; third base, James Smith, shortstop, Minton White and Frank Lopez; outfield, "Bull" Bodkin, "Dobber" McDonald, and Cecil Hutto; Managers were Ed Downie, Leonard Maddux and Tom Breeding. Many of these men were railroad employees and they had good equipment and great uniforms.

Big Shorty married Lolette Lemons and for a time played ball for a minor league team in San Antonio. But he also was a cowboy, having helped run his father's ranch, and a businessman. He and Lolette ran a dry cleaning establishment, the Empire Cleaners, in Sanderson until he sold out to Prince Dishman. At that time he went to work as a brakeman for the railroad and they moved to El Paso. After retirement they moved to Inks Lake, Buchanan Dam.

Little Shorty, Charles, married and steered away from baseball. He graduated from college, moved to El Paso and worked for El Paso Electric for a few years, then went to work for the railroad as a brakeman-conductor, retiring after 28 years.

Big Shorty's daughter, Patty Robertson Wilson, has visited the museum several times over the last few years and talked about her Grandmother Lemons, relating interesting stories and explaining certain aspects of her grandmother's house, the present Terrell County Museum.

Mrs. Wilson said that the Lemons owned a ranch near Lemon's Gap in Brewster Co. During the Mexican Revolution Pancho Villa raided the ranches in the Big Bend and stole cattle. In 1942 the ranchers brought a class action suit against the nation of Mexico to recover their losses. Mexico agreed to pay three of the dozens of claims. The ranchers put their names in a hat, Mexico drew out three names and Louella Lemons was one of them. For the next ten years the nation of Mexico paid Mrs. Lemons and her heirs, from \$200 to \$400 per year per heir.

After Louella retired from the courthouse, she began to make potato chips to sell at the depot. She had a potato peeler machine and several large tubs to fry the potato chips in. She and her grandchildren would bag the chips, and then go to the station with large boxes of yellow chip bags whenever the train came in to sell to the passengers. She always had lots of chips at her house, and if you went to visit, you were sure to get a bowl or sack of potato chips for a snack or to take home.

Mrs. Wilson remembers that when her grandmother passed away in 1943, her casket was set up in the big living room in front of the east window. The funeral was conducted from the home, as was an old custom in Sanderson, and both Mr. and Mrs. Lemons are buried in the family plot at Marathon, where they were married and lived shortly before moving to Sanderson in 1901.