

# Museum News: Boozer Boarding House

By CW (Bill) Smith

One of the more interesting last names in Terrell County history (and one of the earliest mentioned) was the Boozer family, who came to the area shortly before the railroad came through in 1882. Besides the modern connotation of "boozer" (one who drinks alcoholic beverages to the extreme [my definition, not the dictionary,]) I was curious to find out the origin of that family name.

After some time spent searching the genealogy web sites, I determined that David Marion Boozer, father of our Boozers, came from a long family line of ancestors who emigrated from Switzerland, from a village still there called Buus, located on the northern border with Germany in an area that is called Basel-Country, near the city of Basel, Switzerland.

In that very early period families went by the first name of the father, but by about the 12<sup>th</sup> century surnames began to come into existence. Many families simply took the name of the town as their last name, and the Busers chose Buus as their last name, Buser meaning "one who lives in Buus." The earliest record I found for our Boozers was for one Galli Buser, who was born in 1535 and married to Anna Griederin in 1560 in Baseland, Switzerland. At some point in the mid-1700s the Busers immigrated to the US and changed the spelling to Boozer. With that question cleared up I pursued the history of our local Boozers.

According to Carl Newberry, a grandson of the Boozers who put a short thumbnail sketch of the family in the Terrell County history book as related to him by his grandmother, Mattie Black Boozer, the family came to the Sanderson area in then-Pecos County, Texas, around 1882 by covered wagon. He thought they came to homestead twenty miles northwest of Sanderson, in an area with points still known as "Boozer Canyon," "Boozer windmill" and "Boozer dirt tank." With such an unusual name, that is probably most likely. No other Boozer surnames can be found in the censuses of the period for Terrell or Pecos County.

David Marion Boozer was born in Alabama to Thomas and Caroline Boozer, who were born in South Carolina and Georgia, respectively. Only one sister, Julia, was found in David's family line. Martha Margaret Black was also born in Alabama to parents born in Ireland and Georgia.

After moving into town Boozer was mentioned in Mary Ferguson's History of Terrell County (1936,) a school essay, as running a commissary, probably one of the first mercantile stores in Sanderson, but not much is known of



*Boozer's Boarding House, (background) from 1918. The front section was built first about 1910, and the rear addition added later. The child is the author's mother, Marjorie Oatman Smith, who lived in Sanderson in 1918 while her father built the St. Francis Hotel. Photo: Bill Smith*



its success. By 1900 he was building homes in Sanderson, having just finished a new dwelling for Doctor Shinn, according to the *El Paso Daily Herald*.

According to Newberry, when he was a young boy his grandfather, David Boozer left Mattie (around 1910) and moved to El Paso. To support her children, Mattie began running a boarding house for railroaders. At El Paso, David dabbled in land speculation at San Elizario, but eventually went to live with his son, Roy, in Washington State, where he died in 1924. His death certificate listed him as divorced, although no official record of their divorce was found.

Mattie Boozer's boarding house was located on the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> and Oak Street, where Kerr Mercantile stands today. Mattie sold the property to Joe Kerr and Kerr tore down the boarding house to make space to put up his new store. Early photos show a one story building on that spot, but later photos show that additions were made at some point. A second story was added and the house was greatly expanded. Because Mattie had to make her home larger to accommodate the railroad men, her boarding house must have been a success.

Mattie had a big job trying to raise seven children of varying ages on her own, but she never remarried. According to Newberry, the Boozer children were Alva, Clara, Opal, Dave, Clyde, Roy and Stella. Alva was born at Mt. Pleasant, Texas in 1878 shortly after they moved from Alabama. Clara was born in 1879 in Kimble County, Texas, where the Boozers lived before setting out for the Sanderson area. Most of the Boozer children were born in Sanderson and were among the first students enrolled in school at Sanderson in the 1890s. Their first few years were spent on the Boozer homestead northwest of Sanderson, but by 1892 they were living in town, one of only two families of "Anglos," according to Mary Ferguson's history.

Since the railroaders took their meals at the Beanery, Mattie only had to do housekeeping to keep the place in order. She and her large family lived on the first floor, and railroaders occupied the second floor. In an effort to keep her children quiet during the day and from bothering the railroaders who were on a night schedule and had to sleep, Mattie told them that the second floor was haunted and they should not go up there or cause too much commotion to keep the ghosts from causing trouble. Apparently that worked because there were no hauntings reported during the time they lived there. The Boozer home was also used for other residents as the need required, and the Max Bogusch family lived in the house for a short period before building their new jewelry store and living quarters on Persimmon. Carl remembered that his grandmother always kept a large canvas bag of cool water hanging from the living room ceiling with a dipper, for family, friends and railroaders' use. According to the *El Paso Daily Herald*, a church social honoring the departing Baptist preacher was held on the lawn of the Boozer's home, indicating that her yard was landscaped to a degree with grass and plants, and not just swept clean, as was common in those days.

Even with Mr. Boozer's departure, Mattie and her children had a happy life in Sanderson. By 1926, with most of her children grown and married or moved away, Mattie sold her property to Joe Kerr and moved to Arizona to live with her youngest daughter, Stella. It was at Flagstaff, Arizona that Mattie Black Boozer passed away on August 7, 1934, and it is there that she was laid to rest. Being a good Baptist lady, her death certificate listed her as a widow, in a day and age when divorce was not acceptable to good church people. But, as no decree of divorce was found, her death certificate may very well be correct.