

## Museum New: Charlie Wilson, Father of Sanderson, part 2

By CW (Bill) Smith

In a very early article entitled "A Very Deer Experience" from the San Antonio Daily Light, dated February 6, 1886, the writer reports on a visit Charlie Wilson made to the city. He is characterized as "having lived on the edge, and sometimes a bit over the edge of civilization for years," and that he had "met and vanquished the wild and wooly bear, the fierce catamount, voracious wolf, and times without end had settled scores with the treacherous and murderous Comanche and Apache Indians." He had come to town to "see the sights and get polished up a little so as to cut out hated rivals in affairs of the heart."

He and a friend went to see the newly improved San Pedro Park and chanced upon the deer pen with the gate open. He went inside to "while away a few moments fondling with those meek and timid creatures." Suddenly, a young buck took offense and jumped him, knocking him to the ground and severely pummeling him with his sharp hooves. Poor Charlie's brand new suit was reduced to "carpet rags, and the buck then began operations as a sausage factory." Charlie's friend managed to pull him to safety and they beat a hasty retreat. The paper reported, "This morning he is about, smiling, but limping, and said that it was the 'deerest' experience he had ever had and that the San-tone 'deers' are altogether too belligerent for him, and that he will return to Sanderson, where there is not a woman within a hundred miles. He has had enough coming to San-tone to mash the girls." Obviously Charlie had a great sense of humor.

About 1902, Charlie built the wood and adobe Wilson Hotel just north of the depot. Another long adobe building just north of the Wilson served as a hotel for some time, but he tied the two together into one big operation. For years Chinese gentlemen ran the hotel, and the building behind was used as their restaurant.

Uncle Charlie, as the locals loved to call him, was a shrewd businessman and an inveterate gambler, but the big Irishman had a heart of gold and a soft spot in his heart for children, even though he was a confirmed, lifelong bachelor. As his town grew he built public buildings and donated property for the new county courthouse and several churches. When a child was born he sometimes gave the newborn a town lot for a birth gift. Generous and outgoing, nevertheless he always had a deal going, and not always with the law in mind.

In 1906 Charlie sold 90% of his holdings in Sanderson and the area, and in 1910 he moved to El Paso. He had always planned to move on to Cuba, but unfortunately, old age caught up with him. While in El Paso he became ill and had to enter the Old Soldiers' Home in Santa Monica, California. As his health problems grew worse he lost a foot to blood poisoning. Three weeks later he died, on August 25, 1912. Charlie was laid to rest with honor at the Old Soldiers' Home Cemetery, now the Los Angeles National Cemetery. He, who served his country with valor and went on to blaze trails in the west, had gone to his reward.

Charlie Wilson was a man who exemplified the frontier and entrepreneurial spirit of West Texas. Coming to the area during an extremely dangerous period, he carved out a niche for himself and a whole community.

Considering the love and admiration which was universally bestowed upon him, it is no exaggeration to characterize him as the "Father of Sanderson and Terrell County, Texas." And, here it is, a hundred years later, and he is still the topic of conversation.

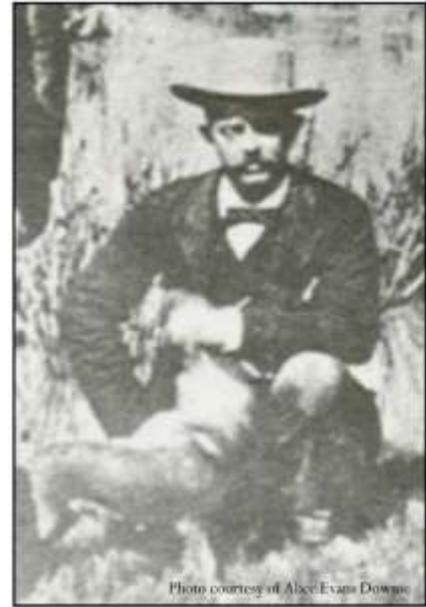


Photo courtesy of Alex Evans Downie