

Museum News: Charlie Rogers – Man of Many Talents

By CW (Bill) Smith

One of the more interesting characters to grace the pages of Terrell County history was Charlie Rogers, truly a man of many talents. He started in the ranching business, and then founded the first trucking company in Sanderson. In his spare time he pursued a hobby and second profession in music. He was an accomplished musician who could play many instruments and whiled away the hours in his retirement playing the piano. As a young boy in Sheffield he and his buddies serenaded the town with fiddles and mandolin. In the 1930s he directed a five-piece jazz band that played for all the area dances. For such a talented man, he came from very humble beginnings.

Nicholas Clyde Rogers, the father of Charles Rogers, was born in Waxahachie, Texas on June 15, 1860, and spent his early life there. He was married to Dotia Bosworth in Lampasas in 1886 and ranched in the San Angelo and Sheffield areas until 1918 when they moved to Sanderson. At that time Mr. Rogers retired from the ranching business. There were four children born to the Rogers: Maude, who died in childhood, Charlie, Clyde and Frankie, a daughter who died in 1918 in Sanderson. Dotia was an aunt of Dee Bosworth, Sanderson windmill man. Mrs. Rogers passed away at Sanderson in 1931, and Mr. Rogers lived on until 1947. They are buried at Cedar Grove Cemetery in Sanderson.

Charlie Rogers was born in San Angelo in 1890. He and his family moved to Sanderson in 1918. He was married to Effie Fletcher in 1920 in Sanderson.

Effie Fletcher was born at Rockwood in Coleman County, Texas, in 1901. Her father, John, and his brother, Len, moved their families to the Barksdale Ranch at Dryden in 1911. Besides running the ranch, John and Len also drilled many water wells in the Dryden area.

Living at the ranch posed many hardships for the families, who were used to living in more civilized areas. Dealing with rattlesnakes, javelinas, the cold winters and the hot summers was difficult. After a few years, they sold the ranch and moved to Mud Creek near Del Rio, then on to Ozona. In 1917 they moved to Sanderson where the brothers went to work for the railroad. It was here that Charlie Rogers and Effie Fletcher met, courted and were married. Their marriage produced two children: Charles Rogers, Jr. and Harvey Rogers. The Rogers lived in Sanderson for 37 years before moving to Fort Stockton.

When they moved to Terrell County, Charlie and his brother Clyde worked in the ranching business. Charlie began with a goat ranch. Desperate to haul water to his ranch, his first truck was an army truck borrowed from the 90th Aero Squadron field, which was in operation at Sanderson at the time. He hauled his water in old gasoline drums, also borrowed from the Aero Squadron. He purchased a truck in 1921 to haul water to his goat ranch during a bad drought. He could not keep up with watering the 1100 animals so he sold the goats and went into the hauling business.

When rains persisted in staying away he decided to go to Ozona and buy another truck, which was second hand and stripped down to the chassis, wheels and motor. He built the cab and a bed and the modern trucking industry in Terrell County was born. Although he couldn't haul as big a load as the old freight wagons that were used to haul animals, wool and mohair to Sanderson, he could move it faster and make many trips in the time it took one wagon to go to town. Soon he was a hot commodity in Terrell County and the area. The money he made with the first truck quickly paid off the debt on his failed goat ranch. He soon added two more Model Ts and shortly he had a large fleet in his operation. He spent the rest of his working life in the trucking business.



Photo: Alice Evans Downie

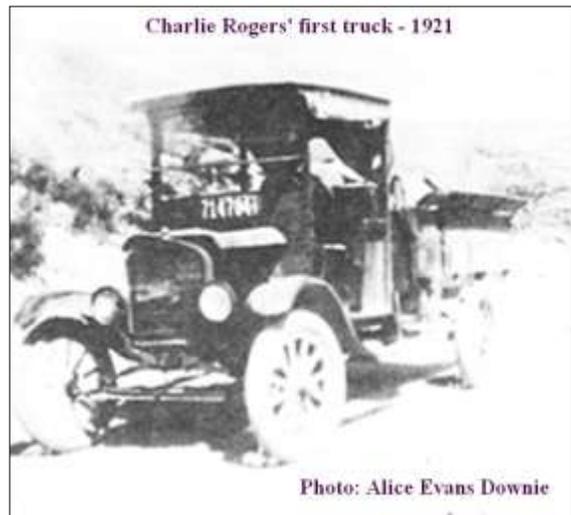


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In addition to hauling wool, mohair and livestock, he brought groceries, supplies and equipment back to the ranches. In his first big livestock haul in 1924, he used his two trucks and got the use of five other trucks and their drivers to haul calves to the railroad at Sanderson for Cecil Arvin. When they reached Nine-Mile Hill north of Sanderson, the seven trucks were roped together with Charlie's big Dodge in the lead, and they made the steep incline in one "wagon train." He used that technique several times over the years.

In later years it was not uncommon for his trucks to clock anywhere from 250,000 to 340,000 miles before being retired from service. By the 1950s Charlie estimated he had driven over 1.5 million miles in his years of trucking.

Charlie finally retired from professional truck driving in 1970 at the age of 79. In 1976 he gave up driving, entirely, and bought a three-wheel bicycle to get him to work as caretaker at the Church of Christ in Fort Stockton, where they had moved in 1957. His wife passed in 1968 and Charlie's health began to falter. He had to move to Alpine for long-term care and he died there in 1977. He and Effie are buried with his parents and his sister, Frankie, at Cedar Grove Cemetery in Sanderson.

Charlie Rogers was a very interesting man and a real pioneer in the trucking industry of Terrell County. With his extensive background in ranching, he was a perfect candidate for hauling livestock, wool, mohair, supplies and equipment for Terrell County and local area ranchers. Many trucking companies are around today, but it all began for Terrell County with Charlie Rogers and an old, borrowed Army truck.