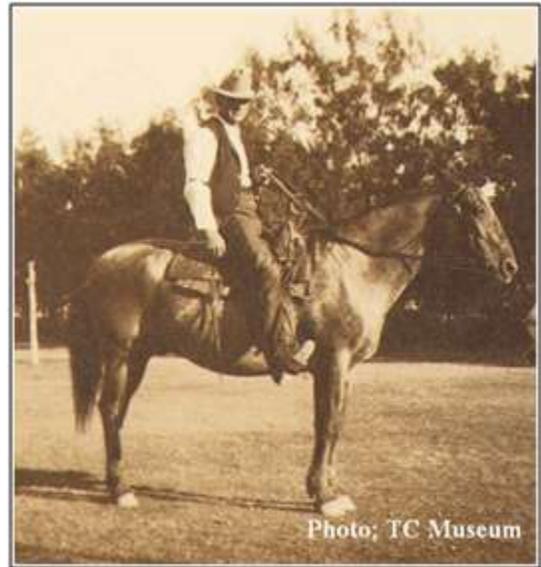


Museum News: William J. (Bill) Ferguson – Ferguson Motors

By CW (Bill) Smith

The period from 1898 through 1910 was a very exciting time in Terrell County. It was a period of phenomenal growth as the population swelled and doubled and tripled in just a few years. It was during this time that Sanderson was made a division point on the GH&SA Railway and men were flocking here to work on the railroad. The railroad in that day and age was very labor intensive and men were hired for all positions. Besides the actual train crews, which used at least four men...conductor, engineer, fireman and one or more brakemen...there were openings in the roundhouse, which at its peak had a staff of over two hundred men working around the clock in three shifts. Men were hired to work at the depot...with operators, freight clerks, rail yard men, telegraphers, callboys and building maintenance men. In the rail yard, men were hired as car maintenance men...repairmen (car knockers,) oilers and water men. One of the largest groups was the crew of men who did track maintenance up and down the line...track walkers, rail crews, bridge crews, and section maintenance men. The railroad was a very large operation.



Many men started their life in Sanderson working for the railroad, and eventually moved on to business ventures in the town...mercantile clerks, private businesses, cowboys, shepherders and shearers, and a score of other occupations. Railroading was and is a dangerous occupation and very dependent on traffic flow. In slow times men were laid off, and in busy times they were hired in large numbers. It was in this environment that W. J. (Bill) Ferguson came to be in Sanderson.

William James (Bill) Ferguson, Sr., was born on March 28, 1882 in Yorktown Texas, and was one of ten children born to John Tyler Ferguson and Rodia Higginbotham.

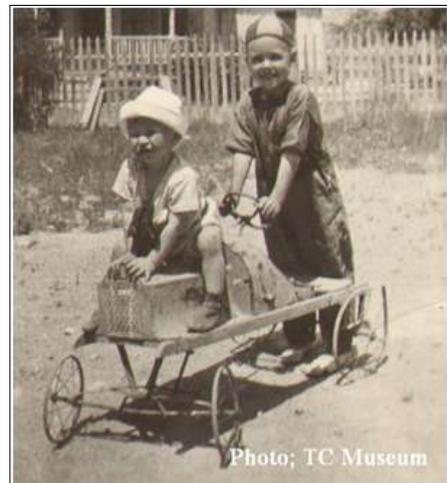
His father was born in Alabama and spent most of his adult life as a farmer in Wilson County, Texas. He was a Civil War veteran, 8th Regiment, Co B, Alabama Volunteers (Infantry), C.S.A. His wife, Rodia, was born in Texas and they were married in 1871 in De Witt County, Texas.

Bill came to Sanderson about 1904 to work on the railroad, eventually working up to the position of foreman of a section crew. Raised on a farm, he had spent time as a youth cowboying and worked on Terrell County ranches in his spare time. He worked also for a time at Kerr Mercantile.

In the mid-Teens, Ferguson was in partnership with the Mussey brothers working in their garage selling Ford automobiles and products. In 1920 he became the sole representative of the Ford dealership in Sanderson and prospered enough to construct a car dealership building in 1922, dedicating it in January, 1923. For the next 23 years, he ran the business, and sold Standard Oil products. In those years he became very active in the support of Sanderson and its business community, being a member of the Sanderson Commercial Club, which gave way to the first Terrell County Chamber of Commerce. He was also active in the fraternal orders...the Masons, the Odd Fellows and the Rotarians.

But, that was not all. In 1921 he decided to run for public office and was elected for two terms as tax accessor. In this time he became the sole agent for the Standard Oil Wholesale plant.

Even though he was a very busy man in those days, he found time for love. He was attracted to a cute, young teacher who came to Sanderson for her first job. William J. Ferguson was married to Lillian



Smith on January 19, 1917 in Sanderson.

Lillian was born June 26, 1894 in Quinlan TX. She came to Sanderson in 1916 to teach 3rd grade for one term, but married the next year. Female teachers at the time were not allowed to be married and teach school, so she resigned her position. In later years she was the secretary for the school superintendent. After Bill passed away in 1946, she took over operation of Ferguson Motor Company, along with Bill, Jr., and spent the rest of her life as a car dealer.

Lillian was a member of the Presbyterian Church and made sure her children were raised in the faith.

On January 16, 1946, Bill, Sr. died at his workplace of a sudden heart attack His services were held at the Masonic Lodge, with the Masons in charge.

Lillian lived for many more years, passing away on October 19, 1960. Her services were held at the Presbyterian Church and she was interred at her husband's side at Cedar Grove Cemetery in Sanderson.

Bill and Lillian had two children. W. J., Jr. was born on December 17, 1917, in Sanderson. He graduated from Sanderson High School in 1934, from the University of San Antonio (now Trinity University) and accepted a position with the Sanderson State Bank. During World War II he served in the US Army as a 1st Lieutenant in the Finance Department, and was stationed in the Pacific. At home he was active in the Sanderson Rotary Club, was a director of Sanderson State Bank and a member of the Presbyterian Church. He was married to Clara Rose Wooten, but they had no children. Bill, Jr., died in 1966 and is buried with his parents at Cedar Grove Cemetery.

Bill and Lillian's daughter, Mary, was born in 1920, and attended the Sanderson school system, graduating in 1936. From 1946 to 1948 she worked as an assistant to Dr. John Swanson, helping with the delivery of babies. She married Hinton J. Baker and spent her life in many exotic parts of the world.

The Fergusons were an important part of life in Sanderson. Coming at an early age in the history of the area, Bill, Sr., like many other people, carved a life out of the wilderness. He and his family made life interesting in Terrell County, and their hard work helped build this community and the county.