

# Museum News: Arthur G. Anderson – Big Man, Big Heart

By CW (Bill) Smith

When A. G. Anderson passed suddenly in December of 1919, he left a void in the lives of many people in Terrell and Pecos Counties. The citizens of both counties and across West Texas, indeed, throughout the whole state of Texas, were shocked and saddened. One of the four first sheep men to settle in the southeast Trans Pecos, along with Downie, Paxton and Purinton, he made a lasting impact on the lives of many men, women and children in the area. His obituary appeared across the state, notifying his many, many friends and business associates of his untimely death and celebrating the life of a unique individual.

A lifelong bachelor, he contributed financially to the education of over fifty young men and women, the only children he would ever have. He gave to his beloved Disciples of Christ denomination and faithfully supported its publications and endeavors. He not only hired a legion of herders and cowboys, he took time to teach them the trade, as a loving father would teach his children. Not one unkind word or hateful comment was found about him, only glowing expressions of love and friendship. He was a big man, with a big heart.

Arthur Gloster Anderson was born on a farm outside of La Grange, Tennessee, in 1851. His father, Tom G. Anderson, came from a wealthy family of Atlantic ship owners, sending shipments of cotton around the world. But, a terrible shipwreck ruined the family and reduced their wealth to nothing. Tom settled in Tennessee and started farming. He was married at least three times, and Arthur's mother, Mary, passed away when Arthur was a young child. When he was age nine, the family of five daughters, three sons and two step-siblings moved to Texas, shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War. They came to Texas in an ox wagon, a traditional prairie schooner, to the Dallas area, moving on to settle on a ranch in the Fort McKavitt area. It was here that Arthur obtained his education in the cattle and sheep ranching business and his love for the great outdoors.

During the Civil War, the Anderson children obtained their public school education in San Antonio and New Orleans. After the war, Anderson worked briefly in a store but struck out on his own in 1874 and started his own ranch in Callahan County, Texas. The area was still under threat of violence from raiding Native Americans, and Arthur entered into the fight to protect the land and the settlers.

While ranching in Callahan County, it was his privilege to order the first shipment of sheep from California over the new Southern Pacific Railroad, taking delivery in Marfa, Texas, and driving the herd overland to his ranch. His provisions were delivered by ox cart from Austin, Texas, and when times turned hard, he killed the last of the buffalo on his ranch to provide meat for him and his employees.

In 1898, Anderson began his sheep operations in Pecos County in the Trans Pecos, and eventually amassed over two hundred sections (square miles) of land and some 30,000 sheep, along with hundreds of cattle, horses and mules. He hired dozens of men and trained them in the sheep and cattle business. Many of them became prominent ranchers in their own right, educated by his skilled and loving hand. He rewarded them liberally for their faithful work, and famous names of the time included Bob Massey of San Angelo; Allan of Brownsville; Jerry White of Argentina, South America; Thompson of Colorado City; the Sherbino Brothers and Will, Ed, Arthur and Alph Harral and John Trent, all of the Pecos country. He also hired an army of herders, many of them Mexican nationals.

In his years in the Trans Pecos he drilled wells, erected windmills, constructed tanks and made improvements to the land and structures. He erected miles of wolf-proof fences and hired trappers to protect his investment.

It was not easy living in the wilds of Pecos and Terrell Counties. There was widespread rustling of sheep and cattle at all times. At one point he lost 2,000 head of sheep to rustlers in one event, and advertised in the *Fort Stockton Pioneer* for several years in an effort to find his lost herd. His abilities as a talented rancher attracted much attention from news



publications. Over six hundred items and articles were found from newspapers across the state publicizing his sales and shipping of cattle, horses and sheep and the sale of his wool to buyers from across the United States.

As a businessman, Arthur Anderson was very successful. He amassed a fortune of \$1,000,000 to an estimated \$3,000,000 in a time when the US dollar was equal to as much as \$30 in 2018. But, he was a simple man with simple tastes. He spent his money on the betterment of others, rather than himself. When his estate was settled and liquidated in 1920, his five sisters and many nieces and nephews received thousands of dollars as heirs. His executors were his brother James Anderson, and Joe Kerr of Sanderson, a dear friend.

By 1916, Arthur Anderson was beginning to slow down. He made an effort to retire from the ranching business, and for the next few years, he sold off stock and reduced the size of his herds, but he was still going out onto the range every day, riding his horse and managing his property.

In December of 1919, he was on his daily horseback patrol of his land and suffered a fall from his horse, being dragged for some distance before coming loose from the stirrup. He was promptly found by ranch employees and was thought to be in recovery. However, pneumonia set in, and on December 19, 1919, he passed into Eternity. His committal services were held at Baird, Texas, where a sister lived, and he was returned to the earth.

Like many Terrell County pioneers, Arthur G. Anderson was larger than life. His exceptional commitment to the well being of his employees and friends stands head and shoulders above others of his time. He was generous, supporting and loving his employees, friends and extended family. Men like him don't walk through this world very often, and we are fortunate to have had him in that exciting time of settlement of the Trans Pecos.