

Museum News: James W. Savage – Grandpa Savage

By C. W. (Bill) Smith

Most of our early pioneers were of unusual character. They were brave and not afraid to venture with their families into unknown territory. James and Margaret Savage and their children were outstanding pioneers of the infant Terrell County, and with their arrival in 1899, spent the rest of their lives contributing to our society.

James Walter Savage began working for the railroad in 1871. He first came to the Sanderson area when the railroad pushed through in 1882, working as a “dirt” man, moving the earth with mule-drawn “fresnos,” preparing the roadbed. He stayed on after the railroad was completed to work as a section foreman in Comstock and Eldridge (Mofeta,) between Sanderson and Del Rio. He finally settled in Sanderson as a water pumper.

James was the second son born to James Anderson Savage and his wife, Caroline. Although the elder James' family could be traced no further than his birth in Abbeville, SC, in 1825, his second wife, Caroline Bagwell and her family could be traced back to 18th Century Tipperrary, Ireland. The Bagwells had emigrated from England and settled for a brief time in Ireland. In the mid-1750s the family immigrated to Virginia, and then moved to North Carolina, South Carolina, and eventually Alabama, where Caroline was born in 1825. Caroline and James were married at Choctaw, Mississippi in 1849.

Our James Savage was born in Mississippi in 1849, the second of four sons, the first having been born to the elder James and his first wife. Caroline passed in 1857 and James Anderson Savage married Elizabeth Shaw and produced six more children.

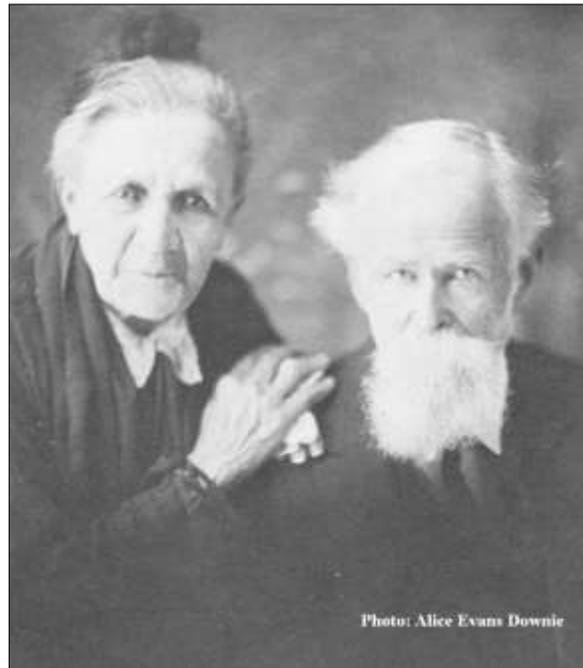
J. W. Savage was born in Webster, Mississippi on October 31, 1849. He was married to Margaret Klosner on February 11, 1875 in Seguin, Texas. Their marriage produced five girls and five boys. A son and daughter passed away at an early age, but the rest survived to adulthood.

Margaret Klosner Savage was born in 1855 to Swiss immigrant parents in Minnesota. Through the years her family moved several times, from Wisconsin to Iowa to Nebraska, and finally, to Luling, Texas. Margaret's mother passed away when she was eleven, and her superior abilities as a wife, mother and nurse probably grew from having to take care of her four brothers at an early age. The Savages enjoyed a close relationship throughout the years as they raised their large brood.

Concerned that there were no educational opportunities in the small railroad settlements where they lived, Margaret insisted that they hire a tutor to make sure her children were prepared for the future. One room of their home was always set aside as the “professor's” bedroom, but it also doubled as the classroom. The arrangement worked very well, and the four oldest children attended college, the boys going to Texas A&M and the girls attending Sam Houston Normal Institute. When they moved to Sanderson in 1899, their oldest girl, Elizabeth, is thought to have been one of the first teachers of Sanderson's one-room school.

In the passing years the Savage family worked in their community to make it a better place. When they moved there in 1899 the town was rife with crime, murder and general mayhem. It was through their efforts and those of other good families that law and order were finally restored and the "bad" element chased from the young city.

Another problem with frontier life was the regular occurrence of epidemics of small pox, measles, mumps, scarlet fever and influenza. The death toll was high, and especially with newborn infants. Through the efforts of Mrs. Savage, a corps of ladies administered to the ills of the community, nursing the sick, birthing the new and assisting



the doctors of the time. Very quickly Mrs. Savage acquired the name "Grandma" Savage for her efforts as town nurse and her ability to reassure inexperienced young mothers in times of need. Soon, the appellation moved to Mr. Savage, and he was known as "Grandpa" Savage to the later generations.

The Savages were good people who tried hard to do good deeds for others, and they gained the everlasting respect and love of their fellow citizens, young and old. They were founding members of the Methodist Church in Sanderson, and were faithful in attendance for the remainder of their lives.

Mr. Savage retired from the railroad in 1918 with a 40+ -year career to his credit, not counting his years building the railroad in the 1870s and 1880s. But even though he was no longer working, he made a daily effort to keep in touch with his friends in the community. He would make a daily walk to the downtown section and to friends' homes to greet and pass the time of day, sharing his voluminous knowledge of many subjects and offering good advice gained from his years of experience. In his obituary in the *Sanderson Times*, this remark was made: "Perhaps there was no other citizen in Sanderson as beloved as 'Grandpa' Savage. He was well known by both young and old, and he was truly an outstanding character in our community. During the thirty-five years that he had made his home here he always held the highest esteem of our people, and he and 'Grandma' Savage, who was his companion through the long years, have many deeds of kindness to their credit.

"In spite of his advanced age, 'Grandpa' Savage, whose mind was still keen and alert, took an active interest in current affairs. His was a familiar figure on our streets, and he greeted every one he met with a kindly smile and a word of cheer. These visits to the town were made up to the day of his last illness. His kindly face will surely be missed."

J. W. Savage passed away in Sanderson at his home on November 12, 1935, at the age of 85 years. He was buried at Cedar Grove Cemetery in Sanderson, after services in his Methodist Church.

Grandma Savage passed away at 83 on March 26, 1938, after a short illness. She was buried at her husband's side in Cedar Grove. To quote in part, her obituary in the *Sanderson Times*: "The death last Saturday of Mrs. J.W. 'Grandma' Savage, marked the passing of one of the real pioneers of Texas and this section. She was a resident of Sanderson for more than 37 years, a familiar character, very kind and thoughtful, and beloved by all. Her passing leaves a vacancy, that will be hard to fill for, even at her advanced age, she was neighborly, and always ready to help those in need.

"With her passed a great store of lore about the early days, the trials of those who fought to advance the western frontier farther westward."

And now, 80 years since their passing, those still alive who knew the Savages remember them with love and respect. They were special people who were true pioneers of Terrell County, Texas, and they and their kind are sorely missed.