

Museum News: Alexander Mitchell – A Splendid Man

By C. W. (Bill) Smith

Terrell County was blessed with great pioneers. These men and women did not see a desolate place. They saw what could be, and went about making a dream come true.

When Alexander Mitchell was a small boy in Scotland, he probably did not envision moving to the wild frontier of Texas. But, Fate would intervene and he would spend half of his life in Terrell and Pecos Counties in West Texas.

Mitchell was born to George (1815-1888) and Isabella Keith Mitchell (1821-1907) on June 2, 1863, in Peterhead, Aberdeen, Scotland. He was the youngest of ten children, six boys and four girls. The Mitchell family could be traced back to the mid-1700s in Scotland.

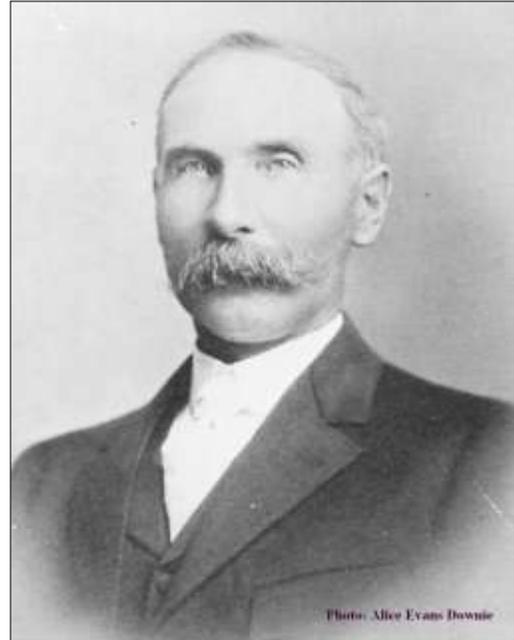
The Mitchells were tenant farmers who also ran a few cattle. He received his early education in animal husbandry working on the farm. In 1881, he immigrated to Montreal, Canada, where he had to remain for a few months to fulfill his immigration obligations, and then he moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where he spent the next ten years as a clerk in a department store.

He saved his earnings and dabbled in investment, brokering a sheep deal in Texas. He came to Texas to buy the sheep and move them to Comstock, Texas. He had lived with his brother, James, in Boston, but by this time James had moved to Crockett County, Texas, and had bought a ranch. After dealing in livestock, Alexander moved to his brother's Crockett County ranch in 1891 and spent the next four years in partnership with him in the livestock business. During that period he became engaged to James' sister-in-law, Jessie Kilpatrick, but she died in a horseback accident before they could be married.

About 1897, the brothers broke their partnership and Alexander purchased a ranch from the Bean Brothers in the future northern Terrell County area. Other cattlemen in that area at the time were Pakenham, Mansfield, Lemons and Ketchum. In the first year he camped out on the property, but soon built a four-room cottage which remained his home in all his years on the ranch.

In those early years on the future Terrell County ranch, he met, courted and married Mary Elizabeth Corder, the youngest of seven children born to Noah and Caroline Schrier Corder, and who was born in Kimble County, Texas, in 1886. In the early 1900s, Mr. Corder had bought into a partnership with other men from Menard, Texas, to purchase the huge Big Canyon Ranch from the Dull Brothers of Pennsylvania. The Corders lived on the ranch, near Alexander Mitchell's place. Alexander and Mary Elizabeth were married by County Judge Joe Kerr in Sanderson on February 6, 1907.

As the years progressed, the Mitchells bought and leased more property, and homesteaded other lands. Mrs. Mitchell inherited a sizeable portion of her father's estate, which bordered the Mitchell Ranch on the south and the west. Mr. Mitchell improved all the properties he controlled, adding windmills and tanks and fencing the properties into large pastures. He ran large herds of sheep, goats, cattle and horses. With the ranch mostly unfenced in the



early days, he had an army of herders to take care of the sheep and goats, besides cowboys and other ranch help to take care of the other livestock.

In 1913 he went into partnership with his brother-in-law, Cecil Arvin, to purchase the stock and lease the land of Henry Packenham. The partnership lasted for many years.

Alexander and Mary Elizabeth had four sons, the first dying in infancy and buried in San Antonio. The remaining three sons were raised on the ranch and attended school in Sanderson, where the Mitchells built a town home.

Although Alexander spent most of his time at the ranch, he was very interested in Sanderson and Terrell County. He was instrumental in the separation of Terrell County from Pecos County in 1905. In 1908 he helped organize the Sanderson State Bank and sat on its board of directors for years. In 1911 he joined with other ranchers in starting the Sanderson Wool Commission Company and served as its president for years. He and his wife were great supporters of the Sanderson school system and traveled many miles in support of their sons' social and sports activities.

Alexander and Mary Elizabeth Mitchell were generous folks who helped their neighbors and fellow citizens as much as possible. Quoting from his obituary in the *Sanderson Times* for November 13, 1936, "A quiet, Christian gentleman, and one who did many kind deeds and was a true friend and neighbor, never expecting a return, he enjoyed the highest respect and esteem of a host of friends made during the many years of being among them, and the many friends who gathered from far and near attested the goodness of this splendid man."

Alexander Mitchell passed away on November 10, 1936 at the age of 74 years. He was buried in San Antonio at the side of his infant son, Alvin Alexander.

For the next twenty-three years Mary Elizabeth lived mostly at the ranch and in Sanderson. When her health took a turn for the worse she moved to San Antonio, but returned frequently to Sanderson and the ranch. She took an active part in ranch operations through those years, dividing the properties among her three sons. On October 22, 1959, she passed away in San Antonio and was buried with her husband and son.

The Mitchells were true pioneers of Terrell County, ever interested in its promotion and success. They spent the better part of their lives here and entered actively into the business, religious and social life of the community. To paraphrase Alexander's obituary, the Mitchells were, indeed, splendid people.