

Museum News

‘White Man’ ~ bear fighter



Photo courtesy of Alice Evans Downie

WHITE MAN — *Jim Fenley and his horse “White Man,” famous in the Trans-Pecos as the horse that fought a bear to save his master’s life.*

The first sheriff of Terrell County was George Fenley, but this isn’t a story about George. George had a brother who was named Jim and they were partners in a ranch southwest of Sanderson, down on the Rio Grande.

Jim lived year-round on the ranch and his wife and two small daughters lived in their town house, only venturing to the ranch in the summers.

Jim had a reputation as one who really liked to dance and he frequented

the dances at Wilson Hall in the old Terrell Hotel, down by the depot. He also was a pretty fair hand at the fiddle and often entertained visitors to the ranch with some fiddle tunes and cowboy songs.

But he was far better known as an expert horseman and trainer, and this is a horse tale.

Around 1900 Fenley was missing a colt and when he set out on his horse, White Man, he soon found what he was



MOM & POP CLYMER'S CAFÉ - Mr. and Mrs. C.E. Clymer ran several businesses in Sanderson at various times. This café sat on the east end of the Hwy 90 bridge, with the Sanderson Motel surrounding it. The building was moved and incorporated into a home and the Sanderson Motel disappeared in the 1965 flood.

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dreading. The colt was half-eaten and partially buried under a pile of leaves and branches, the obvious victim of a bear attack.

White Man was having quite a fit, dancing around with an urgent need to vacate the premises. As all horse people know, horses and bears don't mix and horses are literally "scared to death" of them. They will make any effort to put distance between themselves and their hated enemy.

Seeing that White Man was upset, Fenley dismounted and left him ground hitched and went afoot to find the bear.

As he rounded a large rock, there stood the bear, all 'rared' up to his full height, a very ominous sight.

Fenley began to pump shot after shot into the beast, but it didn't faze the bear one bit. Finally he drew a bead on the bear, right between the eyes, and squeezed off a shot...bull's eye! This only infuriated the bear further, and, with one swat of his massive paw, sent Fenley tumbling head-over-heels, crashing head first into a rock.

As he lost consciousness with the bear looming over him, Fenley recalled thinking, that's it...no use now...I'm done for.

"Señor, señor, wake up!"

Fenley awoke to the sound of a young woman trying to rouse him. As he cleared away the dried blood from his eyelids he found, to his amazement, White Man was standing over him, gently nudging him and neighing to him.

The horse was a pathetic sight...head bloodied, bridal missing, ear torn off and dangling down by a slim string of skin, he had not shied away in the attack. In fact, Pancha, Fenley's young shepherdess, witnessed the events and swore that White Man charged in and attacked the bear, protecting his master from certain death.

After chasing the bear away, White Man stayed at his master's side to protect and console him.

Now this is the horse tale part: everyone knows that horses don't fight bears. It is not in their nature! Yet White Man loved his master so much he overcame his natural fear and saved his master's life. That's one for the books!

Fenley and White Man recovered from their wounds, but what of Pancha? Well, White Man figured very prominently in her life, a story of love, kidnapping and general shenanigans, but that's a horse tale for another time.

References

Terrell County, Its Past, Its People, Alice Evans Downie, 1978. Terrell County Heritage Commission, PO Box 417, Sanderson, Texas 79848

The pink silk robe

I run across stories from the Terrell County history book all the time which show the true nature of the people of Sanderson and Terrell County. Sure, we fuss and fume, squabble and pick fights, like most brothers and sisters do at times. And sometimes it seems everybody you meet has gotten up on the wrong side of the bed that morning!

But in Sanderson, when the chips are down a whole host of friends and neighbors will come to your aid. All petty concerns are forgotten (for the most part) and people you don't even know will offer to help.

And Sanderson has been that way from the beginning.

In the December 12, 1930 edition of the *Sanderson Times* is the report of a car accident at Emerson, which was a stop on the railroad about eight miles west of Sanderson.

A young couple and their little daughter were on a trip to Ft. Davis, and when they came through Comstock they found a young, pretty brunette, Dorris Sybil Lout, walking by the side of the road. They stopped and insisted that she ride with them...the open road at night was no place for a young girl, not quite 16, all alone.



When they arrived in Sanderson they bought gas at the Loma Alta Service Station and went on their way. Just outside

of Emerson, however, the car left the road, overturned and the little girl was killed instantly. Young Dorris, too, was severely injured, and life quickly slipped away before help could arrive.



Sheriff Cook, Constable Landers and Justice of the Peace Gates were notified and proceeded to the scene with all haste. A formal inquest ruled the deaths an accident and W.E. Stirman, the local undertaker, brought the bodies to his establishment in Sanderson.

A few days passed while the authorities made every effort to contact the young woman's relatives. They found a sister and an aunt, but not her mother, so disposition of the body could not be made.

Meanwhile, news of the tragic circumstances spread through the community and a group of Sanderson women took it upon themselves to make a beautiful pink silk robe for the young woman, fitting for her eternal rest. The embalmer, Mr. Doran from Del Rio, took especially good care in preparing the body and by all accounts her final repose was hauntingly beautiful.

After some days the decision was made to bury her in Evergreen Cemetery, the predecessor to Cedar Grove. But it was not to be a small ceremony with few in attendance. As evidenced by the thoughtfulness of the ladies of Sanderson in creating a lovely hand-

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December brought twenty-four visitors to the museum.

Among the visitors were two couples from Battle Park, Saskatchewan, Canada. The Schmidts and the Moores are winter visitors to Texas while the arctic weather rages back home in Canada.

They said the museum reminded them of home, and they had many stories to share about objects in the museum they used as children.

One of the ladies was reminded of her first job as a young woman when she

saw the Dryden switchboard. She said her company used a machine almost identical to ours.

We also had visitors from Houston, Washington, DC, Midland, Enid, OK and Connecticut, as well as the majority from here in Sanderson.

We are especially indebted to Randy Feille, proprietor of *Papalotes*, here in Sanderson. Randy found a stereoscope view of the depot in the '10s or '20s on Ebay and allowed us to make a copy. Thanks, Randy.



1939 SHS BASKETBALL TEAM - The 1939 team consisted of (unknown), Kenneth Litton, Ralph Burluson, Robert Lochausen, Manuel Ochoa, Malcom Davis, Campbell Kerr, Jesus Trevino, Len Haynes and Earl Hurst. Mr. Carriway was the coach.

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made pink gown for burial, the *Times* reported that a large group of Sanderson folks followed her to the cemetery and paid their respects as she was lovingly laid to rest. And as a further act of kindness and respect for someone they did not even know, the grave was piled high with beautiful floral offerings.

The timeless reality of Sanderson is

her spirit...a great sense of responsibility for the destitute and the bereft, a need to help your neighbors in the true pioneer spirit. The community's care and love for those in need is still here, just waiting for an opportunity to express itself. That surely makes it a great place to live, a great place to rear your family.

References

<http://www.sandersonchamberofcommerce.info/cedargrove/L/1.html>, under **Lout, Dorris Sybil**, *Sanderson Times*: December 12, 1930, page 1, *Sanderson Times*: December 19, 1930, page 1

All newsletters may be found at <http://terrellmuseum.info/newsletters/>