

Museum News

Ed McGinley

Public Servant



Photo courtesy of Alice Evans Downie

Ed and Ida Wolfram McGinley

If Uncle Charlie Wilson was the father of Sanderson, Ed McGinley was the nanny who shepherded it in the 20th century and made a modern city from a wild backwater.

On a steamy morning in August of 1906, Cyrus M. "Uncle Charlie" Wilson met Edward McGinley at the Terrell Hotel, temporary home of the county offices, to sign over the deeds to 90% of his holdings in Sander-

son and Terrell County . The deal included Wilson's home and furniture, the town wells and water wagon, the two-storey wood and adobe Terrell Hotel, and a large adobe building to the north that housed the cafe. In addition McGinley got the Cottage Bar Saloon, the barber shop, a railroad men's bunkhouse, along with many rent houses and vacant lots.

But just who was Ed McGinley? He and his family had only moved to Sanderson a few months before, and now he owned most of it!

Edward McGinley's story was a typical 19th Century success story. Born in Donegal, County Cork, Ireland, in 1870, he suffered an early loss in the death of his mother, Nora. Father James soon remarried and as often was the case, young Edward left home soon thereafter and emigrated to Philadelphia to live with an uncle. Always a hard worker, Edward soon had enough money to send for his sister, Bridget, and bring her to America. They settled in El Paso, along with a young Irish compatriot, Charles Gillespie, and soon, Charles and Bridget were wed. The brothers-in-law landed jobs with the GH&SA/Southern Pacific Railroad and thus began a life-long career in railroading.

Starting as a fireman in the 1890s, Ed quickly rose to engineer, spending his career working in an out of Sanderson. In 1898 he was working to the east of Sanderson and happened to meet beautiful young Ida Wolfram in San Antonio. Soon they were married and he took his new bride to El Paso. Ida was from sturdy Hessian stock. Her parents, John and Margareth Wolfram, had emigrated from the Prussian principality of Hesse-Kassel to San Antonio shortly after the Civil War. Proud of their ancestry, but even prouder of their adopted land, they soon became naturalized citizens. When Ida was born in 1877 she was raised to be the all-American girl.

As the years passed for the young couple, Ed's job increasingly called for him to be in Sanderson. In 1906 and with his wife great with child, they moved to Sanderson to make their new home. Always an entrepreneur, Ed soon made a deal with Char-

lie Wilson to buy most of his holdings in Terrell County.

Charlie was growing older and health issues were becoming a problem. In 1910 he bade his farewells and intended to go to Cuba, with a stopover in California. He never made it to Cuba, passing away in 1912 from health issues.

But back in 1906, Ed McGinley took a one-year leave of absence from the railroad to get his new acquisition into shape. They soon moved into Charlie's completely furnished house, which once sat on the corner of Wilson and Oak, where the Sanderson Propane building sits now, and Ed began his plan to upgrade the community.

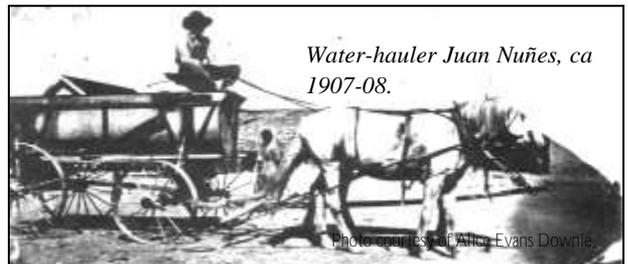
First, Ida took over operation of the Ter-



First water pump, assembled by Ed McGinley himself, about 1909-10, from parts delivered by flatcar.

rell Hotel, but left the restaurant in the hands of Sam Lum, who with other Chinese, had run it for years. Soon, though, the McGinleys hired the F.B. Carters to run the whole operation.

Ed's first project was to get a 30-year franchise from the county to provide water



Water-hauler Juan Nuñez, ca 1907-08.

to the town. Charlie Wilson had sold water by the barrel from his well, delivered by young Fred Savage on his burro. Later, Wilson bought a tanker wagon and Juan Nuñez filled barrels at the homes.

Ed McGinley thought this arrangement was too primitive, so he drilled a second well and brought in huge machinery parts which he assembled himself to pump the water up to a new stone storage tank, high on Javelina Hill, which is still there today. He assembled water pipes from redwood boards that were strapped together to form the first water mains in town. People were shocked to have water piped directly to their homes, and even inside, too!

But he hit a snag before the first water could be delivered. While out on a run he instructed his man to fill the storage tank with water after the mortar had cured on the rockwork. The helper was too eager and filled the tank to the brim, too soon. With a crash of rocks, the wall collapsed and water roared down the hill in a torrent. Ed was not too pleased when he got back to Sanderson!

Over the next few years he also set up a light plant to provide electricity to the little town, almost unheard of in larger places in West Texas in that period.

Along with his own projects, he also served as a general contractor for several new buildings in Sanderson. The Sanderson State Bank building on Persimmon was one such building, built in 1909. He also contracted the building of the Bogusch Jewelry Store, the two-storey red brick building just north of the Terrell County Tax Office, and is thought to be the contractor of the Kerr Hotel, long ago demolished in a catastrophic fire.

By 1912 the McGinleys had four children and the little Wilson house was too small. They moved to a larger home that sat on the

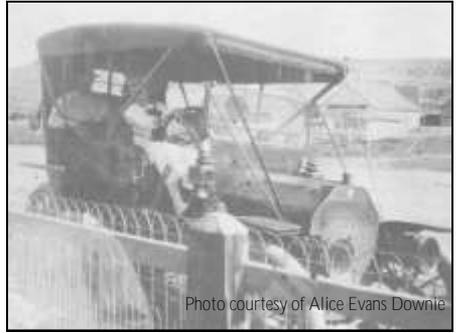


Photo courtesy of Alice Evans Downie

McGinley's early Studebaker, ca 1910

corner of School and Oak, site of the present-day Sanderson Bank. Life was good for the McGinleys. They owned one of the first automobiles in Sanderson. Bought in 1910, it was an EMF-30, forerunner of the Studebaker.

Faithful Roman Catholics, the McGinleys donated the property and lumber for the construction of the first Catholic Church in Sanderson, the Immaculate Conception Church, located on Oak Street between 2nd and 3rd. It was also at their urging, along with the Kerrs, Kuykendalls and Hispanic families, that the first permanent priest was brought to Sanderson for service.

Ed McGinley's interests were not just with Sanderson. He had many friends in El Paso and organized the "Don't Worry" Club there in 1912. Founded by Theodore F. Seward, the Don't Worry Club movement claimed that worry sapped the physical, mental and spiritual life of power. By changing your thinking and not worrying about the trials of life you could improve your mental and physical health. The meetings were used to encourage others not to

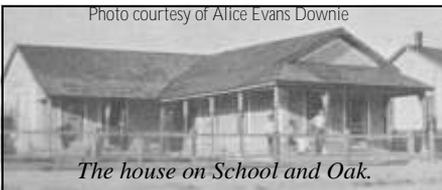


Photo courtesy of Alice Evans Downie

The house on School and Oak.



Photo courtesy of sageventure.com

worry, and Don't Worry Club pages in the newspaper featured funny cartoons and hilarious stories. Oddly, though, members carried a good luck token featuring commercial advertising on the front and a "good luck swastica" on the reverse. The swastica was considered a symbol of good luck for centuries until the Nazis ruined it for everyone.

In 1912, Ed was transferred to Del Rio and he had to move his family to that city. Afterwards they built a home in San Antonio and they moved for the last time.

Ed's interest in Sanderson, however, had not waned. In 1912 he built a railroad bunk house across the street from the present Sanderson Bank. But there was a problem. The first excavation for foundations ran into coffins and human remains. Apparently one of the first cemeteries for Sanderson had been placed in the same location.

In the early days, all of the town except for the Cottage Bar Saloon was located south of the tracks. The railroad forced folks to move north of the tracks when thievery of railroad wood, coal and water by the populace became a big problem. Markers for the cemetery were either rotted away or never there to start. Ed had to petition the county to have the remains removed to the present Cedar Grove Cemetery, known as Evergreen Cemetery in those days.

Ed McGinley's resulting structure served railroaders up into the '80s, but he apparently did not get all of the remains removed. Workers years later turned up more coffin parts and human bones on the same lot.

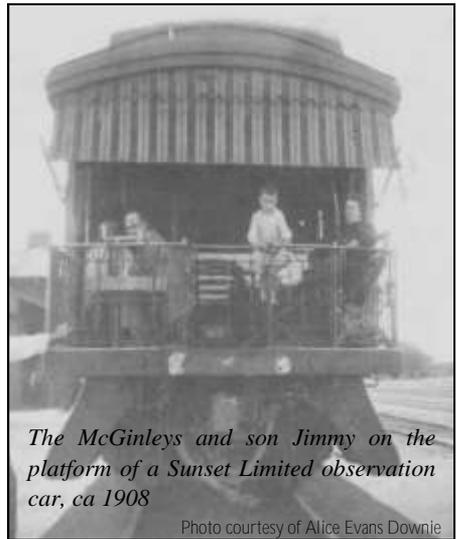
But with his family living elsewhere, Ed decided it was time to dispose of his properties in Sanderson. He began to advertise in area papers in 1914, seeking to sell his complete holdings in Terrell County. He contin-

ued to promote and improve "his" town, but in 1917, he made a deal with Joe Kerr to buy everything he owned.

Life in Sanderson had improved markedly under Ed McGinley's entrepreneurship. A shrewd businessman and skilled tinkerer and mechanic, he improved the quality of life for everyone in the community. The waterworks and light plant took Sanderson to a new level that would take surrounding communities another 20 years to reach. Ed McGinley made Sanderson a garden oasis in a vast desert wilderness.

After the sale of his properties, Ed took up residence in his new home in San Antonio, spending the last 30 years of his life in relative ease. He passed away of heart disease in that city in September of 1947.

Two great Irishmen built and improved Sanderson...Charlie Wilson and Ed McGinley. Now the torch passed to a third Irishman, Joe Kerr, who brought the town to financial flower and success.



The McGinleys and son Jimmy on the platform of a Sunset Limited observation car, ca 1908

Photo courtesy of Alice Evans Downie

References

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The Terrell County Memorial Museum News is published monthly from the Terrell County Memorial Museum, Sanderson, Texas, 79848. Please visit us online at terrellmuseum.info. Phone us at 432-345-2936 or 432-770-9431. Our museum is open Monday through Friday, 10 am to 12 pm and 1 pm to 4 pm, and Saturdays by appointment, at 2nd and Mansfield in Sanderson, Texas.