

Terrell County Memorial Museum News

Here we go again!

by CW (Bill) Smith, Curator

Newspaper publishing has a long history in Sanderson, relatively speaking, considering that Sanderson has not been around that long, scarcely 131 years. There are, of course, cities of the world with much longer histories, but we don't live there, do we?

The town didn't amount to much for the first twenty years. Gradually the population increased and homes and businesses were added. Newspapers could be bought at the GH & SA depot from the major cities of Texas and the United States. Subscription services for a person's home town paper could be had, but there was nothing for Sanderson, itself.

In the early days the telegrapher at the depot would use a chalkboard to write down major news of the state and nation as it came in "on the wire." And, in those days, practically the whole town came down for the arrival of passenger trains, usually twice a day. With the arrival of the last train in the evening, the mail was delivered and folks would mosey on over to the post office in the Terrell Hotel to get their mail.

Around 1899, there was talk of a new newspaper being published in Sanderson by a gentleman named Jack Lee, a previous editor of *The Pecos County Pickings*. A bit of a muckraker, Mr. Lee wanted to name his paper *The Sanderson Gallinipper*.

Now, most folks raised in the dry climes of West Texas have never heard of a "gallinipper." When my Grandfather Oatman ran away from home at the age of 13 to escape his truly wicked stepmother, he went south from Camp Verde, down into the swampy areas of South Texas, along the coast. Years later he would regale me with his tales of trying to plow a swampy field with a pair of mules and one hand, fighting off the gallinippers with his free hand. Gallinippers, he claimed, are the C-5 cargo planes of the mosquito world. Measuring between 1 and 1.5 inches long, local folks joke that they can break your arm just by landing on it. My grandfather said that even though he wore heavy overalls, the gallinippers just poked through the tough fabric like it was gauze...and delivered a very painful bite.

So, one wonders what *The Sanderson Gallinipper* would have been like, but, sadly, it appears Mr. Lee never followed through. *The Alpine Avalanche* reported that Mr. Lee was irrepressible and irrefragable, much like an English prince of old who, replying to the question, "What kind of violent death would you prefer?" answered, "Just sink me in a ton of beer!"

In the late 1800s, Mr. J. Mark Baugh and wife of Bryan, Texas actually began publication of Sanderson's first known newspaper, *The Sanderson Star*. It was published for a few years, but none survive.

A paper published in Fort Stockton, *The Pecos County Pickings*, was unceremoniously booted from its Pecos County Courthouse pressroom in 1900, by order of the Commissioner's Court. Lawyer A. J. Folsom was editor of *The Pickings* and it is not known how he angered his buddies in the "courthouse crowd," but he was so disgusted he moved everything he owned to Sanderson and planned to set up his presses, presumably to snipe at his enemies from afar. *The Pickings*, however, never resumed publication, but he did achieve success as a lawyer in Sanderson and the soon-to-be-born Terrell County, plus had a nice sideline of job printing with his presses.

In 1902, school teacher Henry Scudder Biggs decided to start a newspaper, which he called *The Trans Pecos News*. Biggs was a nice guy, but, as Leo Durocher was misquoted in the 1946 World Series, "Nice guys finish last." Biggs'

school and publishing career was cut woefully short by his assassination at the Sanderson Post Office in 1903 by the corrupt Deputy James McMahon and his toady barman, Ed Bell.

Biggs was a very literate man, and his *Trans Pecos News* was very well done and very popular. But, alas, it was never to be.

1908 was an important date in the history of journalism in Terrell County. That was the year that *The Sanderson Times* began publication. Under a host of owners/editors/publishers, it lasted over 90 years, ceasing publication in 1998. The outer pages were pre-printed with national and state news, human interest stories, trivia and humor. The inner pages were blank, ready for the publishers to fill with local news and photos. That formula worked well for years, but in the latter years *The Times* became totally local.

During that period, a competitor, Tex O'Reilly's *Rio Grande Coyote* began publication on Dec. 18, 1911, but it lasted only a few issues and then faltered.

One tragic loss in the history of *The Sanderson Times* was the burning of *The Times* office in 1922, which destroyed the archive of papers from 1908 to May, 1922.

The Times had a complete print shop and could turn out letterheads, business cards and stationery, even catalogs of courses for the local school district, printed programs, banners, signs and broadsides.

Eventually, the downturn in the local economy due to loss of the railroad, increased mail and transportation costs and a reduction in revenue from advertising and local sales caused *The Times* to print its farewell edition on November 5, 1998. Editor/publisher J. A. Gilbreath very graciously donated the final printing plate for the front page, suitably framed, to the Terrell County Memorial Museum.

But, that was not the end of newspaper publishing in Terrell County. Two years before, in 1996, an upstart competitor, *The Terrell County News Leader*, began publishing under the direction of Christine Hinkle and Sherry McDonald. Eventually they sold out to Jim Street, a veteran newsman from the Dallas area, but the same forces that brought *The Sanderson Times* to its knees also brought about the demise of *The News Leader* on July 26, 2013.

But, again, the firmly entrenched tradition of a local newspaper in Sanderson brought about the creation of *The Terrell County Sun*, which begins publication with today's edition. Hopefully that tradition will continue for many years.