

Lawrence Sullivan "Sul" Ross

Article in "Texas Living".

Born in Iowa in 1838. In 1839 his family moved onto 640 acres where the town of Cameron now sits. This is where he grew up watching his father farm and develop skills to fight Indians. His father Captain Shapley Ross killed the Indian chief, Big Foot. In 1849 the family moved to the new settlement called Waco. There the family ran a hotel, a ferry, and farmed and ranched.

Sul Ross's mother was a school teacher in Waco. She wanted him to have a formal education and in 1856 he entered Preparatory of Baylor University at Independence, Tx. After completing the required two years he pursued a four year degree at Wesleyan University in Alabama which at that time was considered one of the finest schools in the South. When the school turned him down because of deficiencies in math a professor offered to tutor him if he would live with his family. This allowed him to refine his math skills and gentlemanly pursuits.

In 1858 Ross returned to Texas to assist his father who was working as an Indian Agent for the U.S. Army. His father, Shapley, and some Indians from the Brazos were taking the fight to the Comanche who had continued to raid Texas towns and farms. (read the Empire of the Southern Moon if you want to learn just how vicious the Comanches were). The Brazos Reservation Indians proclaimed Sul Ross as their leader and he agreed to lead them against the Comanches. The group tracked the Comanches to a village near Rush Springs, Oklahoma. Ross led the attack at daybreak. He found himself surrounded by about twenty five warriors who were showering the Texans with arrows.

Quoting " In an instant, Ross felt an arrow pierce his shoulder. Struggling to maintain his balance on his horse, he locked eyes with his attacker- a warrior named Mohee whom he had known since childhood. The Comanche picked up a carbine from one of Ross's fallen comrades and shot Ross point blank. Temporarily paralyzed Ross helplessly watched as Mohee drew his scalping knife and charged toward him. A few moments later, Ross was saved as Mohee was cut down by a load of buckshot from one of Ross's men. The Comanche fell dead a few feet away from Ross.

When the battle was over, Ross was too injured to be moved and laid under a post oak on the battle field. Ross begged his Indian companions to kill him to relieve his suffering. Fortunately for the future of Texas they paid him no attention and continued until bringing him to safety."

After he fully recuperated Ross completed his studies at Wesleyan. Governor Sam Houston then asked him to raise a volunteer company of 60 calvarymen where they distinguished themselves at the battle of Pease River. There he recaptured Cynthia Ann Parker who had been captured by the Comanches as a child. (some historians say she did not want to be sent back to her home and never fully accepted it)

Ross fought in the Civil War and advanced to the rank of Brigadier General. His military career ended with the surrender to Union Forces in 1865. He eventually applied for amnesty and secured a pardon from President Andrew Johnson.

After the War he set about making a living on his farm. Even during Reconstruction Ross did well and began acquiring land. But his neighbors convinced him to run for Sheriff in McLennan County in 1873. He arrested Belle Starr and others who had been running roughshod over Central Texas.

In 1875 after serving his term as Sheriff he was elected to the constitutional convention. He helped shape the Constitution of 1876 which is the same constitution used today. He refused to run for governor in 1878 but in 1884 he did agree and was elected and served two, two year terms.

After the second term he wanted to return to his farm and remarked, "it didn't farm itself". But offers of all kind kept coming to him. The one that was attractive to him was at the struggling Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. The states first institution of higher learning was in trouble because of poor leadership and lack of funding. He was excited about the offer but felt he would be criticized for accepting an appointment from the people he had put in charge of A&M.

" Nevertheless, Ross accepted the position and almost instantly brought an infusion of energy and much-need capital to the struggling college. Ross's reputation freed up funds the legislature had previously ben unwilling to invest with the school's previous leadership in place. Under Ross's leadership , the school greatly expanded it's facilities while the families of Texas put their young men on trains bound for College Station by the hundreds."

Ross served six years as President of A&M. While on a hunting trip on the Navasota River he became seriously ill and headed home on December,30. His condition worsened and he died on January, 3, 1898, at the age of 59. The entire student body accompanied Ross's body to Waco. The students honored his death by beginning Silver Taps. A statue of Sul Ross was dedicated on the A&M campus in 1919.

"Ross distinguished himself among his peers. His quite brand of leadership".