

Confederate Hero Led Way To Later Aggie Greatness

Texas Governor Saved College When It Faced Certain Death

By GEORGE CHARLTON

If Hollywood were to ever get hold of a film story based on the life of Lawrence Sullivan Ross, hypertentious producers most likely would call it "unrealistic" and too fantastic to be true. Also, the writer of the manuscript would probably be told to go take a Turkish bath and a few weeks rest.

But old timers around the state and chroniclers of the past know it to be a fact. What A&M's "soldier, statesman, and knightly gentleman" did in his 60 full years is merely history.

He was born in Bentonport, Iowa, on the 27th day of September, 1838, and in the following spring, his father, Captain Shapley P. Ross, moved to Texas as Indian agent in Waco.

At the time, the new metropolitan industrial center, was no more than a trading post. His sister, later Mrs. Kate Padgett, was the first white child to be born in McLennan County.

His early boyhood, spent in an atmosphere of the constant threat of warring Comanches, was a fitting one for the career he would someday assume as commander of frontier forces in Texas.

In 1858 while home on a summer vacation from the Florence Wesleyan University of Alabama, the 20-year-old Ross won his spurs and the sobriquet of "the boy captain" in a desperate battle with the Comanches which included slaying 95 of their number, capturing 350 head of horses, and recovering from the redskins of a little white

girl whose parents were never known, but whom Ross brought up and educated, naming her Lizzie Ross.

A serious wound received during the encounter almost put an end to a brilliant future career of the young soldier. On his recovery, he returned to his alma mater, where he graduated the following summer.

On his return to Texas in 1859, he was immediately placed in command of the frontier by the venerable governor, Sam Houston. Organizing began at once, and he assembled a band of followers who soon were to defeat the Comanches decisively, destroy their stronghold, capture over 400 horses, and rescue Cynthia Ann Parker.

She had been captured years before as an infant by an Indian raiding party. Ross killed the chief, Peta Nocona, in hand-to-hand combat, and the warrior's feathered shield, war lances, and buffalo-horns were sent to Governor Houston at Austin as tokens of victory.

Then began the nation's five-year long continuous tragedy where even members of the same family were in different armies—the war between the states. Entering the Confederate Army as a private, he quickly rose to major, lieutenant-colonel, colonel, and at the age of 25 he became brigadier-general.

He took part in 135 engagements of importance and had seven horses shot down from under him. It was at the battle of Corinth, when in a 300-yard charge on battery Robnett that he lost 50 out of 350 men

before the fort could be reached and taken.

General Dabney H. Maurey, in response to a letter from the Confederate war department, gave "L. S. Ross" as the name of the man who displayed the most distinguished gallantry on the memorable occasion.

A decision was made at Appamatoc court house and a war was ended. Reconstruction, bitter as it was for the South, followed and Ross, like most of his friends, was left penniless. He turned to farming for livelihood. In 1873, he had become sheriff of his county.

His political career began, and in '75, he was a member of the constitutional convention. Six years later, he had been elected to the state senate, in which body he served as chairman of the finance committee.

He was often solicited to become a candidate for governor. He consented in '86, and in that year, was nominated and elected. Re-elected in 1888, Ross received a majority of 152,000 votes.

His record as governor was auspicious. Upon his retirement, he carried with him the plaudits of friends and opponents, having had the honor of affording the state one of the most popular administrations it has ever had.

In the meanwhile, a rather unpopular college located on the Brazos was dwindling to a slow death. It had become known as a "reform school" for incorrigible boys.

Ross didn't quite think things were so hopeless. He made a deal with the legislature: "Don't close



Some "fish" give "Sully" his periodic bath. The bronze statue in front of the Academic Building ranks probably as the most valuable single object on the Campus to the student body. Freshmen have the honor of keeping his appearance equal to his standing.

A&M, and after I finish my term of office, I'll take the presidency." This he did in 1890. When he came on the campus, he held individual interviews with all students. From them he secured a pledge to discontinue hazing of "fish." In a few years, he had the College back on an even keel and had given it a good name.

In many cases, parents sent their boys to Sul Ross, not to college. His administration was a classic example of leadership and diplomacy.

Dr. Bittle, chaplain of the College in '90, said in an eulogy address after Ross' death: "for

eight years back, I think no official of the campus has felt sure in conscience until he unloaded a large share of his plans upon the administrative shoulders of the Governor, as we called him."

A glimpse of Ross' character make-up is mentioned in the same speech: "You friends of his think you have heard him speak and on public occasions his voice did ring out with eloquent thought."

"But you never heard the whole man speak, untrammelled by his natural modesty, forgetful of surroundings, conscious alone of the fact that the youth of Texas were

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Lawrence Sullivan Ross

1838-1898

Soldier Statesman, Knightly Gentleman

Brigadier General C. S. A., Governor of Texas

President of the A.&M. College

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As a business institution serving this community for more than forty years, we take great pride in the contribution this school has made during the seventy-five years of its existence. Our hope is that the years that lie ahead may bring added lustre to the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas.

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