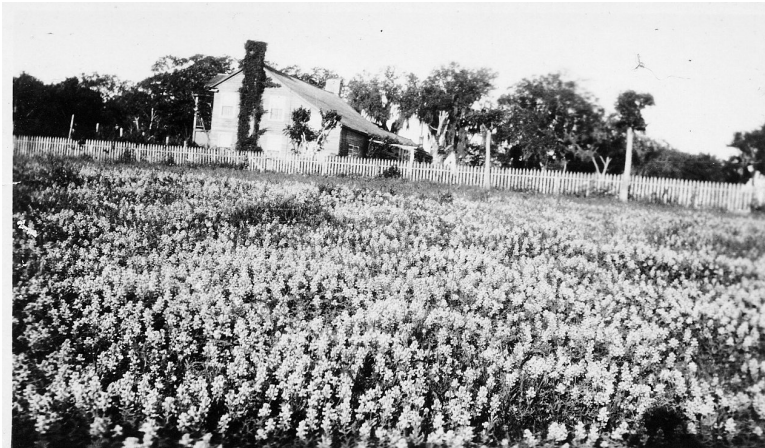


The Cuero Connection

This week we drove to Rockport, our favorite place on the Texas coast, and found as we traveled through Cuero that the DeWitt County Museum was open. It had been many years since we had made a visit and I was especially interested in stopping because my father was born in Cuero and a daybed made by my great-grandfather John Denny Anderson is there. The museum itself is housed in a wonderful old two story dog run house brought to Cuero from Indianola after that coastal town was destroyed by hurricanes twice in eleven years and finally abandoned. Those houses that could be salvaged were taken apart and moved by train or wagon to inland towns. Thirty or forty such houses found their way to Cuero.

John Denny Anderson, his wife Iantha Jane, and their baby son moved to the Cuero area from South Carolina in 1859. The train rails ended in New Orleans and the family traveled the rest of the way in a prairie schooner (covered wagon) built by John himself. Additional mule-drawn wagons carried their belongings.

In 1871 their sixth child and youngest daughter, Mary Iantha, was born. She was my grandmother, and in 1872 the Andersons bought the house and land now known as the Anderson



Anderson Farm

Farm about 10 miles southeast of Cuero. I visited the farm regularly as a child when our family made their yearly trek from Austin to Rockport for vacation, as Cuero was a halfway point and a good place to stop for our picnic lunch and a brief visit with Uncle Irvin and Aunt Judith, who always added lemonade and fresh milk to our sandwiches and cookies. The farm house was build some years before the Civil War, and some of the slave cabins that were used in that sad chapter of American history remained standing

until the 1960's. The derelict old barn is the only original structure still in existence. It was there that I had my only experiences milking cows.

My father remembered his grandfather John, as a tall kindly man and was named John Anderson McCurdy in his honor. In adulthood, Dad bore a strong physical resemblance to the elder John although I always thought my father was more handsome than John Denny's pictures suggest. John Denny was considered a skilled furniture maker, as was his namesake, and the old daybed made with simple hand tools so many years ago stands strong and sturdy yet, still handsome in its simplicity and its largely unblemished original finish. It was probably built sometime in the

1860's or '70s from a combination of oak and pine, not an unusual thing in those days of using whatever materials you had on hand. Some of his tools are still treasured by our family.

Daybeds served a genuinely useful purpose in that un-airconditioned rural world when men and women alike often did heavy manual work in the hot Texas sun, and at some point in the day needed a brief period of rest with “their feet up.” Hot, sweaty, and dirty, it was unthinkable to lie down on the bed you slept in at night, so daybeds were almost universally available in

homes, tucked into hallways or out of the way corners of the kitchen or other public rooms. They were usually cot-narrow with a sloping head and foot for the easy propping of pillows, and covered with an old quilt or an easily washed bed spread. John Denny Anderson’s daybed, made extra long to accommodate tallness, stood in a hallway of the old farm house.



Daybed Made by John Denny Anderson

My father’s grandmother, Iantha Jane, died in 1900 and sometime near that date, perhaps before her death, the farm with the daybed was turned over to their son, Irvin. John Denny Anderson



McCurdy Home at 305 Prairie Street. (Circa 1903)

moved into a house in town down the street from his daughter Mary Iantha and her Presbyterian preacher husband A.H.P. McCurdy. My father was the first child born to his mother (his father was a widower with three older children) and grew up making daily visits to his grandfather’s home. Among the many good memories this contact produced was the summer stack of watermelons from the garden kept in the parlor under the piano for coolness, and, always available to any grandchild who felt hungry.

Grandfather John grew more than watermelons in that prolific

backyard garden and in season supplied his daughter's family with a daily ration of fresh vegetables. When Dad was still a pre-schooler and just beginning to be given real responsibilities in a household which now also contained one or two baby brothers, he was appointed by his mother to walk down to grandfather's with his little red wagon and bring home the vegetables for the day. Bursting with pride, he pulled the wagon successfully down the street and helped his grandfather pack in those vegetables. Then tugging hard on the considerably heavier wagon, he started for home. The homeward trip proved much more difficult, burdened as it was by the heavily loaded wagon and soon encountered unexpected complications.

You see, streets in those days of horse and wagon transportation often consisted of long broad grassy strips of land with worn wagon tracks down the middle. This provided a considerable area of public land producing good grass, and since most folks had their own milk cows, those good beasts were usually turned out in the street in the cool of summer mornings to graze. Several cows were cropping grass when Dad started trudging down the street toward home, and they quickly became interested in the smorgasbord moving slowly along the road. Soon they were ambling along behind and not long after began nibbling a little of this and tasting a bit of that as the young wagoner struggled for speed and finally began to holler for help. Fortunately help was close at hand in the form of his mother, broom in hand. Rushing out of the house, she added her cow-directed shouts to her young son's mother-directed cries and her broom swats to cow backsides, while her persistent son succeeded at last in pulling the wagon behind the safety of the front yard fence.

Many years later, mother and son jointly told the tale time and again to their respective children and grandchildren, sharing their delight in the memory and the laughter it engendered with the gathered family. Telling it now for my own children and grandchildren makes my heart smile as I remember the love and keen sense of humor these two "tellers of tales" shared as they drew the family into their collective memories of the "good old days" while we spooned in homemade ice cream and oatmeal cookies at the end of Sunday dinners.

And I am grateful indeed for the preservation of the old daybed in that jewel of a museum that serves as a focal point for these and many other good memories, helping us keep them alive.

Marian McCurdy Robertson
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