

Sol Mayer  
Family History  
Heritage Park 2019

The Mayer family is honoring their patriarch, Solomon "Sol" Mayer. Sol was the second son of Ferdinand and Jette Mayer. Ferdinand was the fort Sutler at Fort McKavett where Sol learned to trade. In those days cash was scarce so people bought items by bartering -- exchanging livestock for goods. The large amount of livestock received necessitated the Mayer family to go into the ranching business. Ferdinand Mayer bought land in what was called Middle Valley, in 1890, which is about halfway between Fort McKavett and Sonora. It became a stage stop called Mayerville, only to become a post office, called Mayer, Texas. Ferdinand Mayer, then opened a store in Sonora in 1892 and had his oldest son, Max, operate the store. Ferdinand and sons (Max and Sol) purchased the T-half Circle ranch in 1896 which was located in Schleicher and Sutton Counties. Sol bought the ranch from his father in 1901 and took his other brother, Abe, into the ranching business with him. They operated the T-half Circle together until 1907.

Sol is remembered as an astute business man and trader. He left home, one day, with a horse and bridle and 80 cents in his pocket, only to return with six horses and \$80.00. His dad was amazed that he had been able to make such a good deal. Sol went on several trail drives into Indian Territory before he settled down into ranching.

Sol always liked the ranching business. He was the businessman and Abe was the cowboy and that's all Abe wanted to do. Sol always took care of his brothers and sisters in every endeavor he ever went into. He made sure they were included. He and Abe were together in the Val Verde Land and Cattle Company in Crockett County. Then, Sol and Abe parted and each went out on their own to ranch.

Sol's brother, Max, was the merchant of the three sons. He ran the Sonora store, as well as, having stores in El Paso, Del Rio, and Ft. Worth. The Fort Worth store was called the Columbia Dry Goods and was the headquarters for the T-half Circle when they visited Fort Worth during the cattlemen's conventions. Max and some other businessmen were engaged in a gold mine in Mexico in 1922. An informant let it be known that Max and the other men were on a train going to the gold mine. The Federal troops and Pancho Villa, each wanted the mine, thus the men were taken off the train and killed. Their bodies had to be smuggled back across the border for a proper burial.

Sol had a philosophy that you operated by handshake and your word was as good as your bond. He believed that you tended to business, and if you borrowed money, you paid it back on time. Consequently, Sol had good credit and that was something to be proud of because it showed that he paid his debts. He strived to conduct business in an ethical manner and to make every deal honorable.

Sol developed the Madera Canyon area, in Reeves County in 1912-1915, by building a dam at Saragosa and an irrigation system, called the Mount Castle Land and Irrigation Company at Balmorhea and Toyahvale. There the Pecos cantaloupe was started with seeds brought from Rocky Ford, Colorado.

Sol diversified by going into the banking business. He started the Ozona Bank, the Eldorado Bank, the San Angelo National Bank and also the Security State Bank in Pecos. It was through ranching that he got his start in banking, but it was banking that enabled him to acquire an empire, as he picked up people's notes when they couldn't pay.

He built the first railroad between Eldorado and San Angelo, because he wanted to be able to send his livestock directly to Swift in Chicago. Everything he sent to Swift was disease-free and in good condition. They could rely on him as he was good on his word with a handshake. There was also a need for a telephone line so he constructed one between Sonora and San Angelo.

Sol and Ernestine were the philanthropists of the family and gave generously to many agencies and charities. They felt very strongly that people should give back to the community out of their success and monetary gain. Ernestine had very few books to read as a child so, in 1936, she gave \$90,000 to establish and build the Tom Green County Library. Due to segregation, she also opened the Dunbar Library branch for the African American community. Sol and Ernestine, together, opened a community center in the Spanish community in South San Angelo. They purchased World War II barracks to begin the neighborhood center, which was a combination day care and student recreation area.

They both made their mark with the establishment of the West Texas Boys Ranch. Sol helped acquire the land and Ernestine paid off the note. Then, they gave the Boy Scouts a ranch in Menard County which had a running river. It is known as Camp Sol Mayer. He believed in the philosophy of the Boy Scouts. Ernestine believed in the importance of the Girl Scouts and she left her home to them upon her death. They set a legacy in West Texas in giving because they were interested in the youth and their futures.

Sol believed in people and had a sense of humor. When he gave, he always gave with a chuckle and a short humorous story. One story was told of Sol's father almost having a heart attack when Sol borrowed \$50,000. That was an excessive amount of money in those days. His father never commented when Sol paid it back with interest and on time, to Sol's dismay.

Sol helped start San Angelo Community College which now has become Angelo State University. He and Robert Carr bought the furniture for the first two dormitories so they could open the doors. Consequently Mayer Hall and Carr Hall were named in their honor. The Administration Building was named for Sol Mayer when it became Angelo State University.

The Mayer family honors Sol for his accomplishments in ranching and philanthropy. One great grandson, John Mayer, cites that everything that he has is a direct result of Sol's hard work. John has strived in his endeavors to operate as Sol Mayer would have done. Sol Mayer grew his vast empire to encompass five countries. He was very generous in leaving his extensive ranching and business interests to his family and subsequently generations are still reaping the benefits today.

The family notes that ranching has stayed about the same because it depends on water. Not only is rainfall vital for livestock and wildlife, but it's vital for the oil and gas industry, as well. A ranch can no longer survive without diversity. The ranch needs livestock, hunting, as well as, oil and gas exploration to be successful.

Sol Mayer was born January 18, 1869 and died February 18, 1957.