



TARRANT COUNTY

TXGENWEB

Barbara Knox and Rob Yoder, County Coordinators

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Civil War Veterans of Northeast Tarrant County

Alexander McRae Dechman

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Alexander McRae Dechman is unique among our veterans in that he was a native of Halifax, Nova Scotia. He came to Texas during the 1850's, and settled far out on the western frontier. Like many other settlers, Indian problems forced him back east, and he lived in northeast Tarrant County during the war years. He served in a Confederate cavalry unit. He is considered to be the founder of the City of Grand Prairie in Dallas County, and has a major postal facility there named in his honor. He lived at several north Texas locations after the War, became a prosperous businessman, and died in Dallas in 1915.

Alexander McRae Dechman was born near Halifax, Nova Scotia on October 18, 1830. He was a son of James E. Dechman (1802-1879) and his wife, Anna E. McRae, a daughter of Alexander McRae. A. M. Dechman wrote that his grandfather, James Dechman, left Massachusetts as a loyalist and moved to Canada after the Battle of Bunker Hill. We have been unable to find the primary documents which contain Mr. Dechman's memoirs, but have seen references to them in secondary sources.

About the year 2005, one office within the City of Grand Prairie had a photocopy of the Dechman papers, written by Mr. Dechman himself or a diary kept by his wife during wartime. This researcher found a newspaper writer who had seen them within the past year or two.

A lengthy sketch of his life appeared in Frank White Johnson's A History of Texas and Texans, Vol. 3, which appeared in 1916: "*ALEXANDER MCRAE DECHMAN. The late Alexander McRae Dechman came to Texas more than sixty years ago and he left upon the history of this commonwealth the impress of his strong and noble character,--a man of prominence in business activities, in the furtherance of civic and material development and progress and in public affairs. He was widely known in the state and was one of its honored pioneer citizens at the time of his death, which occurred in the City of Dallas, April 10, 1915. He was major in Parsons brigade of a Texas regiment of the Confederate service in the war between the states of the North and the South*

and was in all things loyal to Texas and to the United States, though he was born and reared in the Dominion of Canada and was of staunch Scotch lineage on both the paternal and maternal sides. Major Dechman was born at Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the year 1831, and thus was eighty-four years of age when he was summoned to the life eternal, in the fullness and symmetry of a nature that had been signally true to itself and that had brought out its best during the long years of a signally active and useful career. The major was reared and educated in his native province, and in 1851, when twenty years of age, he indulged his spirit of adventure by making his way to Texas, the voyage having been made down the Atlantic coast and across the Gulf of Mexico to Port Lavaca, Texas, from which point he soon made his way to San Antonio, where he entered the employ of the firm of James R. Sweet & Company, which then conducted a large mercantile establishment in that city. While in San Antonio he became a close friend and associate of "Bigfoot" Wallace, the noted Indian fighter, and he accompanied this historic character on several of his expeditions. About the year 1855 Major Dechman went from San Antonio to the frontier of Northwestern Texas and located in Young County. Soon afterward he established himself in the general merchandise business at Old Fort Belknap, and he lived up to the full tension of the strenuous life on the frontier. There were no railroad facilities in those days, and his merchandise was transported by means of wagons and ox teams from Houston, a trip requiring three months. On the return trip of the freighters to Houston he would ship hides and certain other frontier products to that city. While he was a resident of Fort Belknap his eldest son, Alexander F., who was then a baby, was stolen by the Indians, but within a short time thereafter he was recaptured and was returned to his home. Major Dechman witnessed and participated in many of the stirring events of the frontier and in later years he had a fund of graphic and interesting reminiscences and thrilling tales concerning the early days when Northwestern Texas was run over with Indians and border desperadoes. About the year 1859 Major Dechman removed with his family from Fort Belknap to Tarrant County, where he was soon elected county tax assessor, an office which he filled with characteristic ability. While at Fort Belknap he had served as chief justice of Young County, an office now designated as county judge. In 1861, at the inception of the Civil war, Major Dechman enlisted, in Tarrant County, as a soldier of the Confederacy, and he served until the close of the war, in Parson's brigade, in which he rose to the rank of major. In later years he found much satisfaction in vitalizing his interest in his old comrades through his affiliation with the United Confederate Veterans. After the close of the war Major Dechman returned to Tarrant County, and in 1867 he removed with his family to Houston, with the intention of there engaging in the mercantile business, but he soon departed from that place, on account of the epidemic of yellow fever that was there raging in that year. He then made settlement at Bryan, the judicial center of Brazos County, where he was engaged in the mercantile business from 1867 until 1878. For the ensuing two years he was engaged in business at Dallas, and he then removed to Waxahachie, Ellis County, where he continued his operations as a successful and representative merchant about ten years. He then returned to Dallas, where he passed the residue of his life in well earned retirement and in the enjoyment of the merited rewards of former years of earnest and fruitful endeavor. The following appreciative estimate of the character and services of Major Dechman was written by one familiar with his life history and is eminently worthy of perpetuation in this connection: Major Dechman was born of Scotch parents and possessed in marked degree the strong mental vigor and balance and the rugged physical powers of the race from which he has sprung. He retained all of his mental faculties until the very hour of his death. He was known and greatly esteemed and beloved as a man of the highest character, his entire life having been ordered on a lofty plane of integrity and honor. He was a faithful and zealous member of the

Methodist Episcopal Church and was prominent and influential layman of this denomination. He was twice a lay delegate to the General Conference of the Church, was many times a delegate to its State Conferences in Texas, and was an active worker in the Sunday school. The major was a prominent member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and in 1881-82 he had the distinction of serving as grand master of the Texas Grand Lodge of this fraternal order. Sincere, generous and kindly, he placed true values upon men and things and had naught of intolerance or bigotry, though he never lacked the courage of his convictions, which were invariably well fortified. The maiden name of the first wife of Major Dechman was Annie Mills, and she preceded him to the life eternal by several years. She was born in Alabama and was a representative of the same family line as was the late Hon. Roger Q. Mills, the eminent Texas statesman. Major and Mrs. Dechman became the parents of seven children, all of whom are living, namely: Alexander F., Thomas M., James, Edward S., Mrs. Lillian Margraves, Mrs. Annie Warren, and Mrs. E. B. Ward."

Mr. Dechman married Mary Eliza Mills about 1857. She was born August 24, 1836 in Alabama. We have discovered nothing relating to her parentage or their place of marriage.

The Dechman family appears in the 1860 census of Young County, Texas. They lived at Fort Belknap, where Alexander M. Dechman was serving as Chief Justice of Young County, the second man to hold the office in that county. He and Mrs. Dechman had one child with them, Alexander F. Dechman. His real estate was worth two thousand dollars and his personal property was worth five thousand two hundred and seventy-five dollars. Included in that personal property were four adult slaves. Local historians believe the Dechmans left Young County by July of 1860. The Dechman family apparently moved immediately to northeast Tarrant County.

Alexander M. Dechman's military service records preserved in the National Archives are interesting, if not very extensive. One official record shows he was mustered into the service by John C. McCoy on June 23, 1862, and was stationed at Camp Stonewall Jackson in Dallas County, Texas two days later. Mr. Dechman began his Confederate service as a private in Co. E, 19th Texas Cavalry. The only other papers specifically dealing with his service are signed originals of requisitions for horses, mules, feed and fodder for them, clothing for the men, and other necessaries. One dated September 1, 1863, shows him as a lieutenant in command of Co. E. One paper is a requisition for his pay, for four months at the rate of ninety dollars per month.

Mr. Dechman appears in the 1865 tax list of Tarrant County as the owner of two hundred acres of the M. Lynch survey, worth three hundred dollars; one hundred acres of the S. Looney survey, worth two hundred dollars; seven town lots in Birdville worth two hundred dollars; three horses worth one hundred twenty dollars; and fifteen sheep worth thirty dollars. We have not been able to determine the whereabouts of the S. Looney survey. The Mahaley Lynch survey is one mile square, containing six hundred forty acres, and was patented by Mrs. Lynch in 1855. In modern-day terms, it is located mostly in North Richland Hills, with smaller parts in Richland Hills and Haltom City, Texas. The survey's southeast corner is at about the intersection of modern-day Baker Boulevard and Rufe Snow Drive. Rufe Snow Drive follows its eastern boundary north to about Glenview Drive. Glenview Drive follows its northern boundary to about where Dawn Drive intersects Glenview from the south, and the survey's boundary continues west with no modern-day streets lying along it. No present man-made features mark the survey's northwest or southwest corners.

Mr. Dechman sold his northeast Tarrant County property in 1867 and moved to the Houston area, where one of his daughters died later in that year at the town of Cypress in Harris County. An outbreak of yellow fever caused him to move again, and by 1870 the family had settled at Bryan in Brazos County, Texas.

While Mr. Dechman's family lived in Ellis County in 1880, his agricultural interests lay in Dallas County's Precinct 7, and it was there that he appears in the 1880 agricultural census. He had one hundred twenty-six acres in cultivation, and an additional one hundred ninety-four acres in woods. His farming implements were worth one hundred fifty dollars and his livestock was worth one thousand five hundred fifty dollars. He estimated his farm production in the past year was worth five hundred dollars. He estimated he had made fifteen tons of hay on the ten acres he had devoted to it. He owned four horses and four mules. He had twenty milk cows and one hundred twenty-five cattle of other classes. Within the past year twenty calves had been dropped on his property. He had purchased sixty cattle, had sold two, and nine had died. He had produced two thousand gallons of milk and one thousand pounds of butter. He had four hogs, and twelve laying hens which had produced one hundred dozen eggs in the past year. He made one hundred bushels of Indian corn on fourteen acres, one hundred twenty-five bushels of oats on six acres, and sixty bushels of wheat on twenty acres. He planted twenty acres of cotton and made eight bales on it.

In The Handbook of Texas Online, in the article dealing with "Grand Prairie, Texas," some information about Mr Dechman's part in the founding of the city is found: "...*The community was not organized, however, until 1863 when A. M. Dechman's wagon broke down on his trip from Jacksonville, Texas, to Fort Belknap with supplies for the army commissary. He traded his broken wagon, ox team, and \$200 of Confederate money for a 239-acre tract that had originally been granted on May 1, 1850, to William and Walter Caruth.*" *The community became officially known as Dechman or Deckman when it received a post office in 1874. W. M. Haskett was the first postmaster, and the post office was on land donated by Dechman. By that time a daily stage ran through Deckman on its way from Dallas to Fort Worth, and in 1875 a stage was robbed right outside the community. Early churches in the area included the West Fork United Presbyterian Church, built in 1870 and located in Tarrant County in a community then known as Watson, and the Valley Church on the Dallas County side with a log building that served as both a nondenominational church and a school.*" *In 1876 Deckman grew when the Texas and Pacific Railway was built to the site from Eagle Ford, just east of Dallas. When Dechman surveyed and platted the townsite, he gave the railroad alternating lots in blocks A, B, C, and D, in exchange for the operation of a depot. The post office continued to call the community Deckman until 1877 when it changed the name to Grand Prairie to agree with the railroad which had called the town Grand Prairie since 1873...*"

The census taker found the family living at Bryan in Brazos County, Texas in 1870. Mr. Dechman was working as a grocer/merchant. He and his wife had four children with them in that year: A. F., T. M., M. E., and James Dechman.

On August 28, 1871, A.M. Dechman was one of several Brazos County citizens who signed a letter asking the county court to hold an election for the purpose of instituting a tax to raise money to insure the placement of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas in Brazos County,

The family appears in the 1880 census of Waxahachie, Ellis County, Texas. Mr. Dechman was working as a grocer. There were six children with them: Thomas M., Mary E., James, Lillian, Edmond S., and Annie Dechman.

Mr and Mrs. Dechman appear in the 1900 census of Ellis County, Texas. Their home sat on Main Street in Waxahachie. Mrs. Dechman said she had given birth to eight children, seven of whom were still alive. Mr. Dechman said he was a "capitalist."

Mrs. Mary Eliza Dechman died in Dallas on February 3, 1905. A short notice of her death appeared in the Dallas Morning News the next day: "*Mrs. Mary Eliza Dechman, aged 60 years, died at her residence, 1141 Commerce street, yesterday afternoon.*" She was buried in Greenwood Cemetery. When the 1910 census was taken, he lived alone in Ward 6 of the City of Dallas, and was retired. He appears in the 1910 census as a Confederate veteran.

Mr. Dechman contributed a short article in Mamie Yeary's Reminiscences of the Boys in Gray, 1861-1865, published in 1912: "*ALEXANDER M. DECHMAN. Dallas, Texas—Born near Halifax, Nova Scotia. Enlisted in the Confederate Army June 22, 1862 in Dallas County, Texas, as private in Company E, Nineteenth Texas Cavalry, W. H. Parson's Brigade, Gen Wharton's Division, Trans-Mississippi Department; R. E. Saunders, first Captain; N. W. Burford, first Colonel, and Ben Watson, second Colonel—Was never changed nor wounded. Was never a prisoner, though risked very much rather than be captured. Was Second Lieutenant, then appointed Assistant Adjutant-General of Brigade, rank of Major. Was in the battles of "Nigger Hill," Lake Providence and other fights following Gen. Grant's retreat, Yellow Bayou and other raids. It is painful to recall the sufferings through which the Confederate Army went. Company E had 130 enlisted men, twenty-five of them were discharged on account of wounds and other disabilities, thirty-three died or were killed in battle, nine taken prisoners and fifty-eight in the company were discharged from service on May 25, 1865.*

Mr. Dechman's death certificate says he died of senility at his home at 4412 Worth Street in Dallas on April 10, 1915. He was buried in Dallas' Greenwood Cemetery.

The first of two short notices dealing with Mr. Dechman's death appeared in the Dallas Morning News on April 11, 1915: "*A. M. DECHMAN IS DEAD. Funeral Will Be Held at Residence This Afternoon—Burial to Be in Greenwood Cemetery. A. M. Dechman, aged 84 years, a pioneer Texan, died yesterday at his home, 4412 Worth street. The funeral will be held at the residence at 3 o'clock this afternoon, the Rev. Mr. Morris officiating. The burial will be in Greenwood Cemetery. Mr. Dechman, who was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, came to Texas sixty-four years ago, landing at Port Lavaca. Thence he went to Young County where he became County Judge, but was forced to leave the country on account of the hostility of the Indians. He was afterward Tax Assessor of Tarrant County. He came to Dallas twenty-six years ago. Mr. Dechman was a major in Parson's Brigade, Twelfth Texas Cavalry, Confederate Army, and served throughout the war. He was a prominent member of the Odd Fellows, and was at one time grand master of that order in Texas. Mr. Dechman is survived by Mrs. Dechman and seven children—A. F. Dechman, Jacksonville, Fla. But formerly of Dallas; T. M. Dechman, San Antonio; James Dechman, Oklahoma City; E. S. Dechman, Dallas; Mrs. Lillian Margraves, Rogersville, Tenn.; Mrs. Annie Warren, Milton, Ind.;*

Mrs. E. B. Ward, Dallas. The four sons and A.F. Dechman of San Antonio and Frank Whipple of Italy, grandsons, will be the active pallbearers at the funeral."

A second article, on April 17, said: "*DEATH OF A. M. DECHMAN. Active Worker in Methodist Church and Odd Fellows. To The News. Corsicana, Texas. April 16.—A. M. Dechman, who died in Dallas Saturday, was a native of Halifax, Nova Scotia. He came to this State before the war and lived for some time on the Texas frontier. When the state seceded Mr. Dechman joined Parson's Texas Brigade and served as a Confederate soldier nearly four years. After the war he engaged in business at Bryan. Later he lived at Grand Prairie and Waxahachie where he was also in business. After leaving Waxahachie Mr. Dechman moved to Dallas, where he resided until his death. Mr. Dechman was a faithful member of the Methodist Church and an active Sunday school worker. He was a delegate to the general conference of the church and many times a delegate to the State conference. He was also a loyal member of the Odd Fellow's lodge, having served the order as grand master from 1881 to 1882. In all walks of life he was considered sincere and uncompromising in what he believed to be right. Respectfully, E. C. HUCKABEE.*"

Mr. Dechman's second wife was Henrietta Belle McQueen Meyers (1854-1941), whom he married in Grayson County, Texas on January 11, 1911. After Mr. Dechman's death she is believed to have lived in San Antonio for a time with her niece before entering the Confederate Women's Home in Austin on October 22, 1935. She lived there until her death on March 9, 1941. She was buried in the State Cemetery the following day.

In 2006 the United States House of Representatives designated the U. S. Post Office building at 802 South Carrier Parkway in Grand Prairie to be the Alexander McRae Dechman Post Office Building.

The Dechmans had eight children: Alexander Franklin Dechman, Thomas McRae Dechman, Mary Ellen Dechman, Nanny Dechman, James Dechman, Lillian May Dechman, Edmund Stevens Dechman, and Ann E. Mills Dechman.

Alexander Franklin Dechman was born at Fort Belknap, Texas on November 21, 1858. He married Annie Clower. Lived in Jacksonville, Florida in 1915. In 1920 he was a fruit farmer in Rabun County, Georgia.

Thomas McRae Dechman was born February 21, 1861. He married Susie Farley on November 18, 1886. In 1900 he and his second wife, Emily Jean Mulholland (1859-1936) and their children lived in Ward 7 of San Antonio, Texas. He worked for several years in the San Antonio City tax department. He died at his home in San Antonio at 1124 West Gramercy Street on February 5, 1946, and was buried there in Mission Burial Park.

Mary Ellen Dechman was born September 25, 1864 at Birdville, Tarrant county, Texas. She married Thomas Percival Whipple (1862-1932) in 1885. Her second husband was E. B. Ward. She worked for many years as a medical receptionist. Her last address was 1000 South Ewing in Dallas. She died in Baylor Hospital in Dallas on March 20, 1957, and was buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Dallas.

Nanny Dechman was born January 26, 1867. She died August 7, 1867 at Cypress, Texas.

James Dechman was born February 23, 1869 at Bryan, Brazos County, Texas. He married Gracie Ward on December 25, 1888. He was still alive in 1900, but is not mentioned as one of his father's survivors in 1915.

Lillian May Dechman was born May 20, 1873 at Bryan, Texas. She married Charles W. Margraves on December 7, 1897. By 1900 they were living at Rogersville, Hawkins County, Tennessee, where he worked as a lawyer. They still lived at Rogersville, Tennessee in 1915.

Edmund Stevens Dechman was born April 29, 1875 at Bryan, Texas. He was employed by the City of Dallas for thirty-two years, part of that time serving as tax assessor for the city. He was married twice; first to Mae Belle Williams (1873-1916), and second to Bonnie M Mayfield (1893-1977). His last permanent address was 1221 Alabama Street in Amarillo, Texas. He died March 11, 1959 in the veterans administration hospital at Amarillo, Potter County, Texas, and was buried there in Llano Cemetery. A photograph of him may be seen at the Find-a-Grave site for Llano Cemetery.

Annie Mills Dechman was born March 13, 1878 at Dechman, now Grand Prairie, Texas. In 1900 she was living with her parents in Waxahachie, Texas. Married Richard Wallace Warren (1878-1941). They lived at Milton, Indiana in 1915.

