

William Ellis

William Ellis was probably born in 1838 in Illinois. He enlisted in the United States Army on August 30, 1870, at Cheshire, Ohio listing his home in Noble County, Ohio. Ellis was five feet and two inches tall and he indicated his occupation as a laborer. He was placed in the 25th Infantry Regiment and assigned to Company E.

William Ellis is well known in local folklore as "Dead" Ellis. He received this name after an unusual incident at Fort Concho.

In January 1872, "Dead" Ellis was on patrol with his company near Kickapoo Springs, when he suddenly became very sick. Taken to the Fort Concho post hospital he was examined, and within a few minutes appeared to be dead. He was pronounced so at 9 o'clock that morning. This was a mystery to all because Ellis had always appeared to be in excellent health.

Ellis' body was removed from the hospital and placed in the dead house. A group of Ellis' friends, including Elijah Cox, gathered in the laundry room next to the dead room to sit up with the body for the night.

Ellis' friends began to sing several spiritual songs to remember their friend. At about 11 o'clock one of the men went into the next room to look at the body. He was surprised to see the body twitch and move. The man yelled, "That man ain't dead; He's movin. He's gittin up." Upon hearing this Ellis' friends exited the building through the nearest doors and windows. Ellis was just beginning to recover and was somewhat confused by his surroundings. He noticed he was in the dead house, and terrified by the surroundings, Ellis jumped up and ran outside. A hospital steward heard the commotion and went after Ellis, bringing him back to the hospital. There he remained for a week until he had fully recovered from his illness.

"Dead" Ellis reported back to duty but everyone was a little skittish to be around him. Some men refused to serve with him. Elijah Cox stated that when "Dead" Ellis returned to his barracks everyone ran out and someone shouted, "Go away Ellis, you're dead Ellis." After that people looked upon "Dead" Ellis with fear and superstition, as if he were a specter.

"Dead" Ellis was honorably discharged from the Army in 1875 at Fort Davis, Texas. He returned to San Angelo and he was one of the areas' first black settlers. He was married once for a short time until his wife found out why he was called "Dead" Ellis. Ellis had no children and it is assumed that he had no living relatives at the time of his death.

On December 11, 1928, at 7:30 PM, William "Dead" Ellis died at his residence at 317 West 3rd Street. He was buried on Sunday, December 16, 1928, here in Fairmount Cemetery. The service was conducted by Reverend L.W. Mackey, pastor of St. Paul's Baptist Church, where "Dead" Ellis was a member. His funeral was widely attended both out of respect and out of curiosity to see if he would rise from the dead once again.