

Jerry McKelvy's  
**SANDYLAND CHRONICLE**

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*Walter Hirst wrote several historical articles about Nevada County landmarks. Nevada County was created in 1871 and the town of Prescott was surveyed in 1873. The year 1972 was chosen for the centennial celebration for the town of Prescott since it was between the two years. The following is a condensed version of Mr. Hirst's article about Prescott written for the centennial celebration which he called Prescott---Old Lady of Prairie De Anne.*

**PRESCOTT...OLD LADY OF PRAIRIE DE ANNE**

**By Walter E. Hirst**

**(excerpts from an article published in the March 23, 1972  
issue of *The Nevada County Picayune*)**

The Prescott town site was surveyed in August, 1873 by R. F. Elgin, Dan Cunningham, Jim McSweeney, and a young man by the name of Dudley. There were all surveyors for the Cairo and Fulton Railroad. Enough people had made their homes here by November 25, 1873 to justify a post office and Robert Burns was named as the first postmaster. Six rural routes were established in 1903 but one route was combined with another route leaving five rural routes served by the Prescott post office. (*Note: Mr. Hirst was an employee of the Prescott post office for over 45 years*).

There are two stories about how Prescott got its name. One is that the surveyor making the survey of the right-of-way for the railroad placed a stake near the center of the town site giving the elevation and his name (Prescott) on the board. The other theory is that it was named for an eminent historian, William Hickling Prescott. Many of the towns along the railroad were named after the surveyors. The city of Hope is named for Hope Loughborough, the daughter of the railroad land commissioner.

Prescott's first mayor was William L. Webb and M. J. Saxon was the first marshal. Randolph P. Hamby served as mayor of Prescott for 36 years and also wrote many historical articles about the early history of Prescott.

Prescott's first depot was built across Main Street where it remained until 1911. Dan Cunningham was the first depot agent. He died in the 1880s and is buried at Moscow Cemetery.

To the northwest of Prescott is about five acres of sweet gum trees. The trees were large at the time of the Civil War and a scrimmage was fought there April 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> in 1864. It was known as the Battle of Gum Grove by the Confederate army and the Battle of Prairie De Anne by the Northern army. *This year marks the 150th anniversary of that battle and a big re-enactment of the battle is planned.*

The area where Prescott is located was covered with briar patches and surrounded by a sea of prairie grass. This was the scene in 1870. The homes and business houses were built with lumber at the beginning. The lumber was furnished by John Gee who operated a saw mill about five miles northwest of Prescott. *Fires were a problem in the early days of Prescott with the*

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*wooden buildings and lack of firefighting equipment. One of the most disastrous fires happened in 1882 with a large portion of the town being destroyed.*

*Mr. Hirst wrote in his article in 1972 that the back room of a home at 223 West Third Street was the first home built in Prescott. A two-story home at 116 West Vine Street was an example of the homes built in the early days of Prescott.*

The streets in the early days were a sea of mud in the wet seasons and a cloud of dust in the dry summer months. The walks were made passable by nailing two by twelve planks to cleats side by side. As late as 1900, wagons would mire to the axle in the street between the post office and the courthouse.

The first locomotive used on the Cairo and Fulton Railroad used wood to generate steam to power the iron horse. Steam escaped through the smoke stack and live coals were thrown out all along the track causing many fires. The railroad cars of that day were not equipped with air brakes or automatic couplers and many men lost fingers and hands while coupling the cars. When the railroad was completed to Prescott it was known as the Cairo and Fulton Railroad and the name was later changed to the St. Louis and Iron Mountain Railroad. Today it is known as the Missouri Pacific Railroad. The Prescott and Northwestern Railroad built about 1890 branched off the main line at Prescott to the northwest. This branch railroad played a big part in the early history of Prescott, transporting logs to the saw mills and later vegetables from the area around Blevins and peaches from the Nashville area. It also provided passenger service to the small towns along the route.

The Prescott Hardware Co. opened their store in 1890. William Gee built the first two story brick building on the corner of West Main and West Third streets. His son, Imon Gee, was associated with him in the general mercantile business at that location. Ed Gee and Sam Gee were also in the mercantile business in the 1880s and early 1900s.

One has only to look at advertisements in old newspapers from that time period to see that Prescott was a growing town at that time. There were all kinds of stores, especially general mercantile stores and hardware stores selling farm equipment. There were blacksmith shops, drug stores, jewelry stores, hotels, barber shops, and eating places. Some of the early physicians were Dr. Powers, Dr. Harris, Dr. W. E. Arnold, Dr. Adam Guthrie, Dr. Chastain, and Dr. S. J. Hesterly. Early banks were the Nevada County Bank and the Citizens Bank. The Bank of Prescott opened for business in 1901 and continues to operate today.

Early attorneys were George P. Smoote, D. L. McRae Sr., Thomas C. McRae, a former congressman who served as governor of Arkansas from 1921 to 1925, W. V. Thompkins, Robert Burns, C. C. Hamby, considered to be one of the best criminal lawyers of his time, M. W. Greeson, Henry McKenzie, Randolph P. Hamby, J. O. A. Bush, and Walter Murrah.

Some of the outstanding colored people were S. T. Boyd, Calvin Giddens, Rastus Ansley, Isom McFatten, C. W. Miller, Aunt Ruth Clark, Dave Christopher, and Dock Edwards.

The Little Missouri River forms the northern boundary of Nevada County. The only way it

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could be crossed was to ford it until 1908. The first bridge was built at McIntosh Bluff which connected Nevada and Clark counties. *This is the famous iron bridge depicted on the mural in downtown Prescott. The bridge still exists today but is not passable by vehicles.*

A temporary county seat of Nevada County was established at Mt. Moriah and was later moved to Rosston where it remained until 1877. After the railroad was constructed and Prescott was established, the voters approved moving the county seat to Prescott. The first courthouse was built on the present site. It was replaced in 1911 with a modern building considered to be one of the most beautiful in the state. This courthouse was replaced in the 1960s by the present one-story courthouse.

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*The Old Lady of Prairie De Anne looks considerably older today. The town has declined quite a bit since Mr. Hirst wrote his article in 1972. Most of the downtown businesses are now vacant. People who once traveled through Prescott on busy Hwy. 67 now bypass the downtown area on Interstate 30. Family owned stores we remember are now gone as people travel to larger towns to do their shopping. Even the Presbyterian church closed its doors last year. I don't know what the future holds for the city of Prescott. The future looks bleak right now. The old store buildings need repair work and with the decline in business, it doesn't make much sense to spend thousands of dollars to fix up old vacant buildings. This is a problem faced by many cities all across America.*

*I wish I could have seen Prescott back when four passenger trains stopped there each day, when the hotels were full of visitors, when the streets were crowded with shoppers, when the buildings were in good shape, and when farmers from the rural areas came to town for supplies.*

*I do have some good memories about Prescott from my younger days. I got to see that beautiful old court house before it was replaced. I shopped for clothes and shoes in stores like Dale Ledbetter's, Fore's, Dalrymple & Henry, Teeter Bros., and Rephan's. I was born at the Cora Donnel Hospital and had my tonsils removed there when I was in the third grade. When I got sick, I was taken to Prescott to see Dr. Hesterly, Dr. Hirst, Dr. Avery, or Dr. Crow. We got our medicine at Hesterly's Drug store or Guthrie's Drug Store. I went to the movies at the Nevada Theater. I went with my folks to the Prescott Hardware, a store which had just about anything a person might need. When I was hungry, I ate wonderful hamburgers at one of the cafes. I went to the county fair parades when every school entered a float and schools buses brought children from all over the county to Prescott for Fair Day. I was a student in the Prescott schools from the third grade until I graduated. My first car was a 1966 Ford Fairlane 500 from the Prescott Motor Co. I was fascinated by all the wonderful things to be found at the Sterling's store. I went with my dad to the Co-op farm store to get sacks of feed or maybe a new tire from Ray Cornelius. I worked one summer for Mr. Vernie Meador at the ASCS office. And like almost every person my age, I can never forget the time I visited Cornish Mortuary to see Old Mike.*

*So many good memories from the past. Hopefully, something can be done to revitalize Prescott and give the Old Lady of Prairie De Anne another lease on life.*

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## **A DYING TOWN BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE**

Many of us who live in south Arkansas are concerned about so many small towns losing population. It is not uncommon in many towns to see boarded-up store fronts and vacant buildings. Some of the major industries have closed down in recent years resulting in the loss of hundreds of jobs. When a small town loses five or six hundred jobs at one time, it is hard to recover.

When I think of this decline, I'm reminded of a small town in northern Georgia called Helen. It was named for the daughter of a railroad surveyor and it has a long history. The area around Helen was once the home of the Cherokee Indians. Gold was discovered near there in 1828 which caused a mini gold rush. Gold mining continued until about 1900 and then the timber people came. A large saw mill was established at Helen and for many years the town prospered. When the timber was cut out, people began to move away. By the 1960s, it appeared the town of Helen was on its way to becoming a ghost town. Empty stores and drab looking buildings lined the main highway through town.

In 1969, three business men met at a restaurant and discussed what could be done to spruce up Main Street to make it more attractive to tourists. That part of Georgia was popular with tourists who came for the mountain scenery and the beautiful fall colors. They passed through Helen on the main highway but never stopped.

One of the men knew an artist named John Kollock who had lived for a time in southern Germany. He made some drawings to show how Helen could be made to look like a Bavarian village. The merchants agreed to his plan and work began to transform Helen into a village like one might see in the Alps. Strict zoning requirements were passed to accomplish this. Steep gabled roofs were added to the buildings with bold colors. Cobblestone streets were added to make it more authentic. Any new construction had to meet the strict zoning requirements, even for fast food places like Wendy's.

The town was lucky in that it was located in a scenic area of the Blue Ridge Mountains, with the Chattahoochee River running through town. Some residual gold mining nearby attracted prospectors and rock hounds. A national forest and a state park were nearby. All this added to the appeal once the transformation was complete and soon the tourists began to visit Helen. The increased tourist trade brought more businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and interesting shops. All kinds of activities were scheduled to bring in more tourists like Oktoberfest and the hot air balloon races. Tubing on the Chattahoochee River became popular. The population of Helen, Georgia is only about 500 people today, but it is now the third most visited city in Georgia with about two million visitors each year. It shows what can be done when some civic-minded people put their heads together, decide on a plan, and work together to accomplish their goals.

I had never heard of Helen, Georgia until I read an article about it in a magazine back in 1985. I had to attend a training course at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia that year and I arranged it so that my wife and I could combine a vacation with that business trip. Helen is only about 65 miles from Athens, so when my school was finished, we headed to Helen where we planned to spend the night. We had made reservations at a motel there since we wanted to be

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sure we had a place to stay. As usual, we found out that the motel we picked was not the best looking one. It was an older motel but was clean. It was located on the banks of the Chattahoochee River so that was a plus, although I wouldn't want to stay there in times of heavy flooding. The motel was only a few feet from the river.



We strolled along the streets and visited some of the shops during the short time we were in Helen. We admired all the beautifully decorated buildings. I remember even seeing a phone booth decorated like the other buildings with a very steep roof and painted with bright colors. We found that many of the restaurants featured German cuisine. One thing I liked about some of the restaurants was that the menus were posted outside so you could check out the menu and prices before going inside. I did a search on the Internet and found a web site that offered reviews of 58 restaurants in Helen offering just about any type food you might want. Evidently, the town has grown quite a bit since we were there in 1985.

We didn't have much time to spend in Helen because we had planned on spending the next night in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. I'm sure Helen has changed a lot since we were there almost thirty years ago and if I ever get back in that area, I would like to check it out again.

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Rainfall at my house so far in 2014 was 5.4 inches.

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“Dear Teacher”, wrote an indignant mother, “you must not whack my Tommy. He is a delicate child and isn't used to it. We never hit him at home except in self defense.”

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**MORE PICTURES FROM HELEN, GEORGIA IN 1985**



This is typical of buildings you see in Helen, GA



Telephone Booth



White County Bank in Helen, GA

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## SUPERSTITIONS ABOUT WHIPPOORWILLS

1. Don't mock a whippoorwill; if you do the house will burn.
2. If you see two whippoorwills flying side by side, you will have disappointment for a whole year.
3. If you point your finger at a whippoorwill while it is flying, it will stop.
4. If you hear a whippoorwill and turn a summersault, you will never have a backache.
5. It is unlucky to destroy a whippoorwill's nest or young birds; for every bird or egg you destroy, you will lose a relative.
6. The singing of a whippoorwill on the doorstep or gatepost means death of a member of the household.
7. When you hear the first whippoorwill, cotton or peas can be planted without fear of frost damage.

### THE FARMER FEEDS THEM ALL *Nevada County Picayune—August 9, 1910* (Author Unknown)

The politician talks and talks  
The actor plays his part  
The soldier glitters in parade  
The goldsmith plies his art.  
The scientist pursues the germ  
O'er this terrestrial ball  
The sailor navigates his ship  
But the farmer feeds them all.

The preacher pounds his pulpit desk  
The broker reads his tape  
The tailor cuts and sews his cloth  
To fit the human shape.  
The dame of fashion dressed in silk  
Goes forth to dine or call  
Or drive, or dance, or promenade  
But the farmer feeds them all.

The workman wields his shiny tool  
The merchant shows his wares  
The aeronaut above the clouds  
A dizzy journey dares  
But art and science soon would fade  
And commerce dead would fall  
If the farmer ceased to sow and reap  
For the farmer feeds them all.

#### DEATHS IN 2014

##### Bluff City Cemetery

Leona Murphy Powell (Jan. 14, 2014)

Randy Wayne Glass (Feb. 18, 2014)

Margie Adams Knight (Feb. 28, 2014)

Myrtle Martin Knight (Mar. 1, 2014)

Helen Florene Hardwick (Mar. 9, 2014)

##### Ebenezer Cemetery

David Benjamin Harrison (Feb. 23, 2014)

##### Caney Cemetery

Myrtie Green Bearden (Jan. 9, 2014)

J. W. Glass (Mar. 14, 2014)