

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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LONE GROVE



Lone Grove was located about three miles southwest of Bluff City. It was in Ouachita County until Nevada County was created in 1871. Lone Grove had a post office from 1858 to 1866 and is shown on the 1865 map of Ouachita County. The 1860 census records for that area show the post office as Lone Grove.

Lone Grove was located on what was known then as the Prairie D'Anne Road. This was the road Civil War soldiers traveled during the Camden Expedition of 1864 and is mentioned in the military reports of that march toward Camden just prior to the Battle of Poison Springs.

The area around Lone Grove was sparsely populated at the time of the Civil War. Bluff City was also shown on the 1865 map. It was called a "crossroads" in one of the reports from one of the Civil War generals during the Camden Expedition.

The post office at Lone Grove was discontinued in 1866 and nothing much is known about the place until around 1900 when a rural school was established there. At that time it was called Gum Grove. The school existed there until 1929 when it was consolidated with Bluff City.

After the school consolidation, Gum Grove (formerly Lone Grove) was used as a meeting place for the Church of Christ. The congregation possibly first used the vacant school building, but later a small frame church building was constructed. Services were held there until 1980 when, the congregation decided to worship with the Bluff City congregation. The area was once well populated and farming and sawmill work were the main occupations. After World War II, many people moved to nearby towns and many of the old farm fields were planted in pine trees.

Today there is no evidence of Lone Grove/Gum Grove. The location of the old school and church is now covered in timber. The location is at the intersection of county roads 290 and 403.

The following article deals with the school at Gum Grove where my McKelvy ancestors attended in the early 1900s. You can check the November, 2005 issue of the Sandyland Chronicle for an article entitled "The Autobiography of Gordon Irvin—Part 7" in which he describes what it was like going to school at Gum Grove.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

THE SCHOOL AT GUM GROVE

Gum Grove School was located about three miles southwest of Bluff City at the intersection of County Roads 290 and 403 just west of the big power line. This spot was once known as Lone Grove back in the Civil War days and was one of the few post offices at that time. The post office was discontinued in 1866 and I suppose that is the reason the name Lone Grove was soon forgotten.

I did a little research to find out when the Gum Grove School was first organized. I found in Book 37, Page 355 of the Nevada County deed records that Robert M. Henry and Nannie J. Henry, his wife, deeded to School District No. 60 three acres of land on June 7, 1900 for the sum of \$16. I think we can assume that the Gum Grove School began about that time.

The Gum Grove School was a two-room wooden structure. I have several pictures of school groups posed at the building which show a small part of the building, but I have not been able to find any photo which shows the entire building. The earliest photo I have is this one dated 1918-1919.



I don't have any identification for any of the students in the above photo. This photo belonged to Harland McKelvy. He and my father were both born in 1911 and I don't see either of them in this photo. I'm not sure this is even Gum Grove School even though it's labeled as such. Notice the boards on the building are vertical, while the boards in the later photos are horizontal. Could it be that this building was destroyed for some reason and the school had to be rebuilt???? If you recognize anyone in this photo, let me know.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE



This picture shows a little of the Gum Grove school building. As you can see, it was just a plain wooden building like many schools at that time. This photo is dated "about 1924". My dad is the fifth boy from the right on the front row. It appears that the students were posed boy-girl-boy-girl etc. for this picture. I don't think they would have done it unless instructed to do so. Check the June, 2003 issue for the identification of these students.



This photo shows some of the younger students at Gum Grove. Date possibly 1928. I have another photo dated 1928 and it shows the same lunch box in the window as this photo, so I assume the photos were probably taken the same day.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Consolidation

Nevada County had many school districts in the early days because there were no buses to transport students to school. Kids had to walk, so schools were usually located so that students would not have to walk more than about three miles one way. Creeks were commonly used as boundaries between districts to avoid students having to cross swollen streams during flooding. By the late 1920s, school buses were being used to transport students and newer schools were being constructed. Consolidation soon began to be discussed to eliminate some of the smaller districts. Gum Grove was one of those small districts that the county board of education believed should be consolidated with a larger district and the Bluff City School was the logical place. The consolidation plan was for several small schools to consolidate with Bluff City. These included Gum Grove, Theo, and the DeWoody School. Petitions were circulated among the patrons of the districts involved to agree to consolidate.

A Dispute

It is a major blow to a community to lose its school because that is the center of the community activities. No community wishes to see its school closed down and the Gum Grove community was no exception.

In June of 1929, a court case was filed in the Nevada County Circuit Court. The case name was School District No. 1 and No. 60 vs. Special School District No. 2. The details of the case are recorded in Book I, Page 648 in the Nevada County Circuit Clerk's office.

Here is a summary of that court case:

The case involved extending the territory of Special School District No. 2 (Bluff City) to include all the territory of School District No. 60 (Gum Grove). At that time there were 155 qualified electors residing in that district and 89 had signed the petition for consolidation. However, 16 of the electors who had signed the petition had changed their minds and asked that they not be counted in favor of consolidation. They claimed the carriers of the petition practiced a fraud on them by representing that the electors residing in the Gum Grove district favored the petition and that they accepted as true the statements by the carriers of the petition and that induced them to sign the petition when in fact out of 41 electors residing in the Gum Grove district, only four were in favor of consolidation.

The Nevada County Circuit Court decided the statements made by the 16 electors were true, but it was not sufficient cause to remove their names from the petition, and that therefore a majority of the electors had approved the petition and that it should be granted. The court gave them 90 days in which to appeal the decision.

Appeal to the Supreme Court

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

The case was appealed to the Arkansas Supreme Court. Consolidation with Bluff City went forward for the 1929-30 school year while the case was being appealed. In 1930, the Arkansas Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Nevada County Circuit Court.

The Gum Grove School had served the community for about 30 years from 1900 to 1929. I'm not sure what happened to the Gum Grove school building. I do know that the Gum Grove Church of Christ began meeting at that location soon afterwards. They may have used the old school building at first or it may have torn down. The earliest picture I have of the church building was in the 1950s. The church continued to meet at Gum Grove until 1980 when it too had to consolidate with the Bluff City church due to population decline in the community.



Gum Grove Church of Christ (1950s)



Gum Grove Church of Christ (early 1980's)

The Gum Grove church building was moved off the property and used as a private residence. Another building was moved onto the property and used as a hunting camp for a short time and then it was also moved off. Today, that location has gone back to timber. Only a few of us older people know the history of Lone Grove and Gum Grove—that it was once the site of a post office, a school, a church, and a hunting club.

RIDING THE TOAD SUCK FERRY

When I was teaching school back about 1969, I took a two-week course at the University of Central Arkansas located in Conway, Arkansas. Conway today has a population of about 58,000 and has three colleges, which is unusual for a town that size.

I was sharing a room with another teacher from Bodcaw who was taking the same course. We had some extra time one afternoon after supper and decided to drive out of town on Hwy. 60 to the Arkansas River, a distance of about eight miles. The highway department operated a ferry there called the Toad Suck Ferry. We thought it might be an interesting experience just to ride across on the ferry, look around for a while, and then ride the ferry again on our way back to campus.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

At that time the Arkansas Highway Department operated about 30 ferries in different parts of the state. There are several stories about how the river crossing near Conway came to be called "Toad Suck". The one most often mentioned is that some of the early men who operated the ferry could be found at a local tavern sucking the bottle until they swelled up like toads.

Back to my story. My roommate and I left the campus late that afternoon headed for the Arkansas River. We arrived just as the ferry was docked on our side of the river getting ready to make a crossing. They had room for our vehicle so we hurried on down to the ferry as the operator motioned for us to drive up the ramp. In our haste to get a spot on the ferry, we failed to read all the signs posted.

We got out of our car and stood on the ferry as the engines revved up and the ferry backed away from the landing. We floated downstream a little ways and then the ferry headed slowly across to the other side. While we were out in the middle of the river, we asked one of the men who worked on the ferry what time they closed for the day. We were quite surprised when he said, "This is our last trip". So, there we were, headed to the other side of the Arkansas River and no way to get back across to get back to campus.

The only choice we had was to find another crossing. Thank goodness, we had enough gasoline in our car because Hwy. 60 goes through a pretty remote area with few towns. We didn't have a road map with us, so we didn't really know which roads we needed to take to get to Morrilton, the next river crossing upstream. We came to the little town of Houston (population 140) where we intersected Hwy. 113. We saw a road sign for Morrilton and headed north on Hwy. 113. We were thankful we were now headed in the right direction and could find our way back to campus. Our plan to ride across the Toad Suck Ferry and back which would have been about twenty miles or less turned out to be a drive of about sixty miles.

The moral of the story is to always be sure you have plenty of gas when traveling in an unfamiliar area and also to pay attention to posted signs. The operating hours for the ferry were posted, but in our haste to get on board, we didn't read the sign. It's also a good idea to have a road map unless you have one of these modern navigation systems on your vehicle.

I'm glad I got to ride the Toad Suck ferry because its days were numbered. The ferry was soon replaced by a bridge across the river as part of the McClellan-Kerr navigation project. From what I can find out, there is only one ferry still operating in Arkansas today. It is called the Peel Ferry in extreme northern Arkansas near the Missouri state line. It is about thirty miles north of Yellville on Hwy. 125. The ferry crosses a part of Bull Shoals Lake. The ferry only operates in daytime, so be sure to read the signs. This is a very remote area.

The Toad Suck Lock and Dam near Conway is the site of an annual festival called "Toad Suck Daze" which is very popular. I've never been to that event, but I can say I once rode the Toad Suck Ferry.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Two years later, I got to ride the ferry across Lake Norfolk in northern Arkansas. That trip was longer and took about forty-five minutes. A couple got married on that ferry in 1980 while the ferry was making the crossing.

THEY GOT AWAY WITH IT

There were several serious racial incidents in Arkansas in the late 1800s that are documented in newspaper articles from that time period. Ouachita and Nevada counties were not immune to these type incidents.

One incident that was reported in newspapers across the country occurred in our area. Sayre Lumber Co. was the main industry in the old town of Sayre on the railroad that ran from Gurdon to Camden. Sayre was located in Ouachita County very near the Nevada County line near the present town of Reader. The saw mill at Sayre employed a large number of laborers, both black and white.

On May 29, 1897, about ten black employees of the saw mill were sleeping in a shack located in Nevada County. A rowdy group of white men set the shack on fire with the men inside while firing their guns in the air. The black men stayed inside until the roof was about to fall in and then decided to make a run for it. As they left the shack, they were fired upon by the white men. Four of the black employees were wounded and the other six escaped. The men then left leaving the injured men lying on the ground. The men recovered from their wounds.

The New York Times newspaper called the incident "a horrible case of butchery". The incident was also reported in newspapers in Idaho and Kansas with headlines such as "BLACKS VS. WHITES" and "ARKANSAS RACE WAR".

Some of the reasons given for the attack were that these white workers did not want to work with the black employees or that the saw mill was hiring more black workers than white because they could pay them less. Reports were that the incident had the desired effect since many of the black workers left the area following this incident.

Some of the local residents condemned the actions taken by the mob, but notices were posted warning residents not to cooperate with law enforcement or risk having their homes burned. A detective from Little Rock did an investigation of the incident which resulted in four men being indicted by a grand jury for arson with the intent to kill. These men were Deal Beck, Willis Beck, Tom Johnson, and Allen Sherry. Reports were that these men were transient laborers and not local residents of the county.

According to information on the Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture web site, the four men were tried in January, 1898 in the Nevada County circuit court. The judge ruled that the evidence presented was unreliable and all four men were acquitted of all charges.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

I spent a good bit of time at the Nevada County court house trying to find the court records for that trial but was unable to locate them. Records that old are in poor shape and some are not organized as they should be. I found one case involving a man named John Beck, but the papers were not in the box where they were supposed to be. I'm not even sure this John Beck was one of the men involved. I was hoping to learn a little more about the case but sometimes files this old are just not available or they were filed in the wrong place. It would be like looking for a needle in a haystack to go through all the boxes of old records at the court house.

All the information I have about the incident comes from the old newspaper reports from out-of-state papers and from the web site previously mentioned. We have no local newspapers available for that year.

This was not the only racial incident during that time period. An unknown number of blacks were lynched in Little River County in 1899. Seven bodies were found hanging from trees riddled with bullets and many more were reported missing. That same year, a race war took place in Lake Village, Arkansas in the southeastern part of the state when a group of blacks attacked white residents. El Dorado, Arkansas was placed under the control of the military in 1910 after racial problems in that town.

Doing a search in old newspapers for "race war" will bring up many articles about similar incidents in many parts of the South in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The perpetrators in most of these cases went unpunished. Most news reports end with the statement "The identity of the men involved is unknown" or something similar to that.

Rainfall Record

January – 4.7 inches February – 6.5 inches March – 12.7 inches April – 6.4 inches
May – 1.3 inches June – 2.3 inches July – 4.8 inches August – 10.7 inches

August was one of the wettest Augusts on record in Arkansas. It is usually a hot, dry month. This year it was hard to keep up with the lawn mowing because the grass grew so fast. Many lawns in our area are infested with Bahia grass, a fast growing grass that puts up a tall stem in just two or three days after mowing. It does well in dry weather and even better in wet weather. It's a good grass for pastures, but not a good grass for a lawn. Some people spray their lawns to try to keep it under control.

We have already received almost 50 inches of rain this year. Our normal rainfall for the year is 52.9 inches and we still have four months to go. People around Bluff City seldom complain about too much rainfall since the deep sand absorbs rainfall quickly, but it does cause erosion and damage to the county roads. It was nice to see so much green grass in August. Usually, our lawns are a lovely shade of brown this time of year.