

Jerry McKelvy's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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“OLD MIKE” AND “TOMMY MOON”

Just about everyone over age 65 who grew up in Nevada County or in the surrounding area knows about “Old Mike”. He was an unidentified man found dead at the city park in Prescott in 1911. His body was embalmed by undertaker J. D. Cornish and kept at the local mortuary in hopes that his identity could be determined. After much publicity and visits by hundreds of people looking for lost relatives, he remained unidentified. He was given the name “Old Mike” by funeral home employees. Finally, in 1975, “Old Mike” was laid to rest in De Ann Cemetery by order of the state. It had been 64 years since his death.

I remember visiting “Old Mike” at the funeral home a couple of times. It was sort of a teenage rite of passage that you must go to the funeral home and ask to see “Old Mike”. It was an experience a person would never forget. When I saw him, he was in a standing position in sort of a closet dressed in a nice suit of clothes. The funeral home gave him a new suit of clothes each year. In order to view “Old Mike”, a curtain had to be drawn back and a light in the closet could be turned on by pulling a string.

Only a handful of people were present that day in 1975 when “Old Mike” was finally laid to rest. His marker was a metal funeral home marker embedded in a block of concrete. It only had the name “Mike” and the date of death (1911). A few years ago, someone installed a nice store-bought marker for “Old Mike”. It has his date of death and the date he was buried. It also had a pencil engraved on it because it was believed Mike made his living by selling pencils.

Another similar case happened in Marianna, Arkansas. In 1909, an unidentified man was found dead there in a railroad yard. Malaria was the suspected cause of death. His body was taken to the local funeral home and kept for possible identification, but nobody claimed him. He was given the name “Tommy Moon”. Some say that was because he had a moon-shaped tattoo. Others say it was because he was found by a man named Tommy on a moon-lit night. “Tommy

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Moon” remained at the funeral home for the next 53 years.

Over the years, several people tried to identify him. A woman from Pine Bluff thought it might be a man named W. M. Kerr who had disappeared in 1909 at the age of 32. She said there was a resemblance, but she was only 10 years old when she saw the man and could not be sure it was him.

New owners purchased the funeral home and “Tommy” went along with the purchase. The new owners wanted to get rid of the body, but there was no way to dispose of it legally. A deal was worked out in 1962 with the University of Arkansas Medical Center whereby the body would be donated to them for medical research. They picked up the body, but that was not the end of the story. Shortly after that, the university called the Marianna funeral home and said for legal reasons, they could not use the body and respectfully requested the funeral home to take possession of it again, so “Tommy” was returned to the Marianna funeral home.

About that time, a woman who had heard about the case came forward with pictures claiming that “Tommy” could be her father who had been missing since 1909. She described some scars which matched those on the body. That evidence along with the pictures convinced the funeral home that “Tommy” was the lady’s father and the body was released to her.

She said her father had been ill when he left home back in 1909 and was never heard from again. His name was George Clark Berry. A funeral was held for George Berry at Vanndale Cemetery in Lee County in 1962 with about 200 people attending. I checked the Find-a-Grave website and found him listed at that cemetery. His marker is just a simple concrete block about a foot square with the name Geo. C. Berry and the dates 1870-1909.

There are lots of similarities between these two cases. Both “Old Mike” and “Tommy Moon” died about the same time. Both were kept at the local funeral home for an extended period of time. Both were finally buried and both had simple grave markers. The main difference is that “Tommy” was finally identified. The identity of “Old Mike” remains a mystery.

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New grave marker for "Old Mike" at DeAnn Cemetery



In 1921, "Old Mike" was posed standing by a new Studebaker hearse purchased by Cornish Funeral Home.

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OK TO WEAR OVERALLS

I guess schools have had to deal with the issue of dress codes for a long time. I found an old news article in *The Hope Star* from 1938 on this subject. Evidently, a young girl about eight or ten years old came to school at Bluff City in Nevada County wearing overalls in cold weather because they were warmer than a dress. Some thought it was inappropriate for a young girl to wear masculine clothing to school and Mr. W. H. Carter and Louis Pryor (I suppose, school board members) asked the Arkansas attorney-general if there was a state law against it. The question asked was: Do superintendents and boards of education have the authority to prohibit girls wearing masculine clothes to school, especially when the weather is cold?

Attorney-General Jack Holt notified Mr. Carter and Mr. Pryor that there was nothing in state law prohibiting an eight or ten year old girl from wearing overalls or other masculine attire. He said that such clothing may have been all the girl's family could afford.

The assistant attorney-general said, "I personally am inclined to think that girls wearing trousers to school are no more conspicuous than any other female who may wear masculine apparel in public, nor do I see any more reason to prohibit such attire in the classroom than in any other public place".

This ruling from the Attorney-General on the Bluff City case allowed girls all across Arkansas to begin wearing overalls or denim jeans to school.

Perhaps some folks at Bluff City remembered the famous "Lipstick Case" of 1924 in another small town in northeast Arkansas. The school board there had a rule that girls could not wear transparent hosiery, low-cut dresses, face paint or cosmetics to school. A young girl named Pearl Pugsley felt the rule was unfair and came to school with face powder and lipstick. She was expelled from school. That case went all the way to the Arkansas Supreme Court which ruled in favor of the school board. Pearl Pugsley finished her schooling at another nearby school. Because of her case, the school board rescinded their policy against girls wearing lipstick and cosmetics to school the next year. Pearl Pugsley is sometimes called "the Joan of

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Arc of the Lipstick War". That case received nationwide newspaper coverage and Miss Pugsley was even offered a \$1000 per week motion picture contract.

Another old community in Nevada County was Brisbane. It mainly consisted on a store and post office which served the families living nearby. The following article appeared in the September 29, 1906 issue of *The Nevada News*.

SOMETHING ABOUT BRISBANE AND HER SPLENDID PEOPLE

Situated in the northeast corner of Parker Township, midway between Bodcaw and Willisville, lies what was formerly known as Brisbane post office. The post office was abolished this spring after the establishment of rural route # 2 out of Rosston, but for eighteen years it served the people in that community. It was established in 1888 by B. G. Murrah who later became and is still a citizen of Prescott. Mr. Murrah in those days operated a country store, carried a splendid stock of goods, and did a good business. He was succeeded as postmaster and storekeeper by his son-in-law, P. H. Herring who has since engaged in business at Bodcaw. The store at present is operated by Clint Martin, a most enterprising young gentleman whose hospitable home is always a welcome stop for the way-farer.

Brisbane is and always has been a splendid community. It was the former home of W. R. Basden, no better man who ever lived in Nevada County. Capt. Basden is now living in Texas, but the old homestead still stands and is now owned and occupied by Bob Martin. Another prominent old settler who has since moved away is Sam Bailey, now living in Texas. His Brisbane homestead is occupied by John Butler, one of the most prosperous farmers in the community.

Prominent citizens still living here are the Finchers, J. M. Parrish, the Bennetts, A. Manning, the McKissacks, Tom May, M. M. Murrah, the Martins, and others. Brisbane is surrounded by a moral atmosphere that gives her citizens pure and honest lives. Nothing bad has ever come out of Brisbane. Its religious advantages are excellent. On the west is Union Church with sacred memories of past meetings when souls were brought to Christ, and on the east is Mt. Zion, a church which has lent and is still lending its silent influence for good. To the southeast is far-famed Holly Springs, a Methodist Episcopal church and one of the most popular places of worship in the county.

Educational advantages are excellent with splendid schools taught each year at Brisbane, Mt. Zion, Holly Springs, and Union.

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The land around Brisbane produces well and the people are prosperous, happy, and contented in the full enjoyment of life.



MODERN MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF BRISBANE

MAKE HASTE

I remember my grandmother using the phrase “make haste” quite often, mostly when telling my grandfather to hurry up. It’s been a long time since I heard anyone use that phrase. I suppose the older folks got that term from the Bible because it is used in several passages—Deut. 32:35; Judges 9:48; I Sam. 9:12; 2 Chronicles 35:21; Esther 5:5; Esther 6:10; Job 20:2; Psalms 38:12; Psalms 70:1; Psalms 70:5; Psalms 71:12; Psalms 141:1; Proverbs 1:16; Isaiah 49:17; Isaiah 59:7; Jeremiah 9:18; Nahum 2:5; Luke 19:5; Acts 22:18 and possibly others.

AS THE CROW FLIES

I hear this phrase quite often and even use it myself to mean the shortest distance between two points. I don’t know why the crow was used in this phrase because crows usually fly in a circular pattern looking for food, but I suppose they could fly straight if they wanted to. Sometimes the distance between two places on the roads is quite a bit further than the distance would be if we could travel in a straight line.

Another phrase that means about the same thing is to “make a beeline for something” meaning to go the most direct route without any detours. I suppose that phrase comes from watching the behavior of bees.

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Someone sent this to me via email.

NOT MY PROBLEM

A mouse looked through the crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife open a package that contained mousetraps. Retreating to the farmyard, the mouse yelled, "There is a mousetrap in the house!" The chicken clucked, "Mr. Mouse, I can tell it concerns you, but it is of no consequence to me, please don't bother me with it."

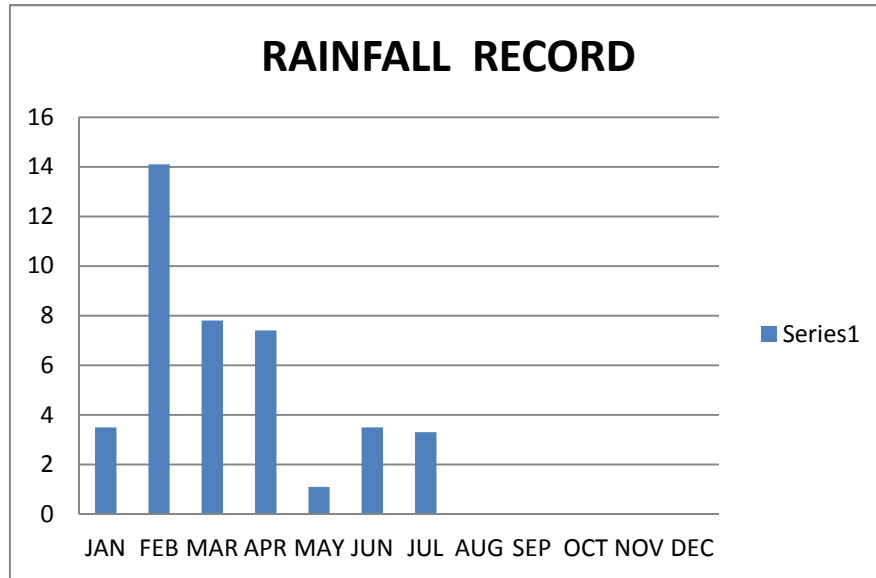
The mouse turned to the pig; the pig sympathized but said, "I'm sorry Mr. Mouse, but there is nothing I can do about it but pray."

The mouse looked at the cow, and the cow replied, "I hate it for you, but it's no skin off my nose."

So the mouse returned to the house feeling rejected and alone. That very night a sound was heard throughout the house, the sound of a trap catching its prey. The farmer's wife rushed to check the trap, not seeing that it was not a mouse, but the tail of a venomous snake. As she approached the trap, the snake bit the farmer's wife. She was rushed to the hospital for treatment, but returned home with a fever. Everyone knows you treat a fever with chicken soup, so the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard to retrieve the main ingredient. His wife's sickness continued, so friends came to sit with her around the clock. To feed them, the farmer butchered the pig, but the farmer's wife continued to get worse, and she finally died. So many people attended the funeral that the farmer had to slaughter the cow to provide enough meat to feed them all. As they ate, the mouse looked through the crack in the wall with great sadness.

The next time you hear someone has a problem and you think it doesn't concern you, remember, when one of us is threatened, we are all at risk! Never forget that we are involved in this journey called life together!..

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Can you help identify these folks? The man in the center is Howard Cornish Foster. The lady on the right is Thelma Dunn.



What is it? Send me your answer or guess.

If you experience some pain after enjoying a meal, it could be attributed to the table of contents rather than the appendix.