

Jerry McKelvy's
WAY BACK WHEN
April, 2024

THE ECLIPSE

Parts of Arkansas will be in the path of the solar eclipse on April 8. The maps I've seen show it to cover a wide path from the southwestern corner of the state to the northeast. It appears that I-30 will be near the edge of the main path which means Prescott, Arkadelphia, Hope, and Texarkana will be near the edge of the path of totality.

It has been predicted that 1.5 million visitors will come to Arkansas to see this event first-hand. Hotels and state parks have been booked for weeks and we have been told to expect much more traffic on the highways than usual.

Arkansas has only seen two total solar eclipses—one in 1834 and one in 1918. The one in 1834 was before Arkansas became a state, but it entered the state about where Fayetteville is now and exited the state around Helena on the Mississippi River. The maximum total eclipse only lasted a little over one minute. Records and newspapers are scarce that far back, so we don't know much about this eclipse in 1834.

The next one was in 1918. It was reported in Little Rock that heavy clouds rolled in which hindered the effects of the eclipse, but it was said it was too dark to read a newspaper outdoors and people turned lights on in their homes. The maximum darkness from that eclipse lasted one minute and 11 seconds.

Hopefully, the clouds will stay away on April 8th so that people can experience this coming eclipse in all of its splendor. A chart I saw says the partial phase will last about an hour and a half and the totality phase will last two to four minutes. The time for totality at Prescott is at 12:30 p. m. I am amazed at how astronomers can predict these events with such certainty.

People living in earlier times were very concerned about such events. Some people worshipped the sun and they considered an event that darkened the sun as being the work of demons. It is an unusual event and it is no wonder that many people were concerned about something they didn't understand.

This will be the only chance most of us will have of witnessing a total solar eclipse, so if you are interested in such things, you might make plans to drive somewhere in the path of the eclipse, but be careful. Drivers may be looking up in the sky instead of at the road ahead.

There have been some strange weather events in our past history such as major hurricanes, terrible tornadoes, extreme heavy snowfalls, extreme heat in the summer, or extreme cold in the winters. There is much talk these days about climate change and global warming, but if you read past history, you will see that weather extremes are nothing new. I tend to rely on what I read in Genesis 8:22—While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

WAY BACK WHEN

Speaking of weather extremes, I came across an article from April 22, 1916 which was printed in the Batesville Daily Guard newspaper in Batesville, Arkansas. The article was about the peculiar year of 1816, sometimes called "The Year Without a Summer".

1816 WAS A PECULIAR YEAR

(Yellville Echo.)

Mrs. Jane S. Robbins, who resides with her son in law, W. A. Smith, in Union township, clipped from a paper about 45 years ago the following, which will be read with interest, and if a repetition of the weather conditions repeat every one hundred years, as stated by some authorities, we may look for some strange weather during 1916. The article follows:

While every one is speaking of the present season as being remarkable in its characteristics, I have gathered for your readers some reliable facts of the year 1816, known as "the year without a summer," says a New York Tribune correspondent.

Few persons now living can recollect it, but it was the coldest ever known throughout Europe and America. The following is a brief abstract of the weather during each month of the year:

January was mild, so much so as to render fires almost needless in parlors. December previous was very cold.

February was not very cold. With the exception of a few days it was mild, like its predecessor.

March was cold and boisterous, during the first part of it; the remainder was mild. A great freshet on the Ohio and Kentucky rivers caused a great loss of property.

April began warmer, but grew colder as the month advanced, and ended with snow and ice and a temperature more like winter than spring.

May was more remarkable for frowns than smiles. Buds and fruits were frozen; ice formed half an inch thick; corn killed, and the fields, again and again replanted, until deemed too late.

June was the coldest ever known in this latitude. Frost and snow were common. Almost every green thing

was killed. Fruit nearly all destroyed. Snow fell to the depth of ten inches in Vermont, several in Maine, and also in Massachusetts. Considerable damage was done at New Orleans in consequence of the rapid rise of the river. The suburbs were covered with water and the roads were only passable with boats.

July was accompanied with frosts and ice. On the 5th ice was formed of the thickness of a common window glass throughout New England. New York and some parts of Pennsylvania Indian corn was nearly all destroyed, some favorably situated fields escaped. This was true of some of the hill farms of Massachusetts.

August was more cheerless, if possible, than the summer months already passed. Ice was formed half an inch thick. Indian corn was so frozen that the greater part of it was cut down and dried for fodder. Almost every green thing was destroyed, both in this country and in Europe. Papers received from England state "that it would be remembered by the present generation that the year 1816 was a year in which there was no summer." Very little corn ripened in the New England states. Farmers supplied themselves from corn produced in 1815 for the need of 1817. It sold at from \$5 to \$7 per bushel.

September furnished about two weeks of the mildest weather of the season. Soon after the middle it became very cold and frosty; ice formed an inch thick.

October produced more of its share of cold weather; frost and ice common.

November was cold and blustering. Snow fell so as to make good sleighing.

December was mild and comfortable.

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The weather is probably a topic of discussion more than anything else. Kin Hubbard once said "Don't knock the weather; nine-tenths of the people couldn't start a conservation if it didn't change once in a while." There is much folklore and superstitions about how to predict the weather. Here are just a few:

If cows are lying down in the pasture, wet weather is on the way.

If leaves fall early, the winter will be mild. If they fall late, the winter will be wild.

If smoke from the chimney settles toward the ground, a storm is at hand.

If hornets build their nests low, the winter will be hard.

If the rooster crows when he goes to bed, he'll surely rise with a watery head.

When a cow tries to scratch her ear, a shower is very near.

If the squirrels appear very fat with bushy tails, the winter will be colder than normal.

You can tell the temperature by counting the chirps of crickets. Count the number of chirps per second and add 40 to get the temperature. This does not work if the temperature is under 50 degrees because the crickets stop chirping.

You can tell how bad the winter will be by cutting into a persimmon seed. If the seed looks like a spoon, expect heavy snow. If it looks like a fork, the winter will be mild. If it looks like a knife, expect frigid winds.

Some people are convinced that the moon affects our weather and how plants grow. Many of our ancestors would only plant their seeds when the moon was in the right stage because they believed that affected how the plants grew and how well they produced.

We know the moon affects ocean tides and many believe it also has other effects on the human body. It is said you shouldn't have surgery when the moon is full because there could be excessive bleeding. Doctors say there are more emergency room visits when the moon is full.

Consider the word lunatic. The root word is luna which means moon. It was once thought that some people could become mad or turn into a werewolf when the moon was full. The word is not used much anymore although some people still use the word lunacy when describing some bizarre misbehavior.

EXTREME WEATHER FROM THE PAST

Throughout our past history, there have been instances of unusual or extreme weather. Many of us remember the unusually hot summer of 1980. Little Rock reached 100 degrees or above on 41 days that summer.

The hottest temperature ever recorded in Arkansas was 120 degrees at Ozark on August 10, 1936. Bluff City in Nevada County reported 112 degrees in August, 1936.

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The coldest temperature ever recorded in Arkansas was minus 29 degrees at a place called Pond in northeast Arkansas on February 13, 1905.

The coldest winter in Arkansas history was in 1918 with an average winter temperature of 24.2 degrees

Little Rock had a total cumulative snowfall of 32.6 inches in 1960.

The greatest 24-hour snowfall ever recorded in Arkansas was 25 inches at Corning, Arkansas on January 22, 1918.

Here are some reports from old newspapers about some extreme cold spells in Arkansas:

January 25, 1918—For the first time in over 20 years, the Ouachita River at Camden was frozen over. (*The Monticellonian—Monticello, Arkansas*)

January 25, 1918—With temperatures hovering near zero here, the Mississippi River was frozen solidly for the first time since 1876.--(*The Green Forest Tribune—Green Forest, Arkansas*)

January 5, 1911—For the first time in 12 years, the Arkansas River at Ft. Smith was frozen sufficiently thick to skate upon. – (*Prescott Daily News—Prescott, Arkansas*)

January 25, 1918—J. T. Greer of Ozark was called upon to deliver a casket to a home across the Arkansas River. He drove to the river in a wagon bearing the casket. At the river bank, the casket was placed on a sled and taken across the frozen stream. --- (*The Pulaskian—Little Rock, Arkansas*)

Extreme temperatures are just a small part of the total weather picture. We have also had extreme flooding throughout our history, unusually large hail storms, and extreme periods of drouth plus tornadoes which happen mostly in the spring, but can occur any time of the year. Sometimes, Arkansas is even affected by hurricanes which can bring heavy rainfall and winds. Someone once said, "If you don't like the weather in Arkansas, just wait a while and it will change".



A well-known landmark in Chidester, Arkansas was removed last month. The Mercantile started February 4, 1911 with G. R. Riffe as president, H. E. Kirby as vice-president, W. C. Stinnett as secretary and treasurer, and Thomas Benton as manager. (*Photo taken in 2014*)

WAY BACK WHEN

THESE TIDBITS THAT MENTIONED PRESCOTT, ARKANSAS APPEARED IN NEWSPAPERS SCATTERED OVER THE UNITED STATES

Inter Ocean, Chicago, Il, Friday, July 6, 1877

Fight With Horse-Thieves

Little Rock, Ark., July 5 - A special to the *Gazette* from Prescott, Ark., gives an account of a fight between a gang of horse-thieves and a Sheriff's posse fifty miles below that place, in which one of the posse, a Cumberland Presbyterian minister, was killed. the murderer was riddled with buckshot.

St. Louis Globe-Democrat, St. Louis, MO., Saturday, July 28, 1877

A Wife-Murderer Hanged

Special Dispatch to the *Globe Democrat*

Prescott, Ark., July 27 - Albert Trammal, a Negro preacher, was hanged to-day at Ruston (Rosston?), Nevada County, for the murder of his wife five years ago. Trammal confessed his guilt.

Daily Arkansas Gazette, Little Rock, Ark., Sunday, March 28, 1875

Prescott

A Correction - Thanksgiving Day Observed - A Growing Town

Editors *Gazette*: Please allow me to correct an article that appeared in the local columns of your paper of the 25th instant, which stated that a new Catholic church, at Prescott, and a new Presbyterian church at Hope, was about completed. The statement is true, except that the Presbyterian church is at Prescott, and the Catholic church is at Hope.

Yesterday, Thanksgiving Day, was held sacred there; all business suspended, except one retail liquor shop, kept by J. P. Bell. This was open all day; he was also very thankful for the pennies that happened to pass his way-they, however, were very few, as the people generally turned out to church.

The sermon delivered by Rev. Mr. Welburne, on this occasion, gave me a chance to see and know that Prescott can boast of some very pretty girls.

Daily Arkansas Gazette, Little Rock, AR, Wednesday, August 21, 1878

Personal Notes

Maj. Callaway and family went South yesterday to Prescott, Ark., to hunt a cooler clime.

Daily Arkansas Gazette, Little Rock, AR, Wednesday, September 11, 1875

City and General Items

Messrs. Kyle & Cassidy, of Prescott, Ark., propose to donate the proceeds of their saloon next Thursday to the yellow fever sufferers in Memphis.

Daily Arkansas Gazette, Little Rock, AR, Wednesday, January 4, 1882

A Death at Prescott, Ark.

To the Editor of the *Gazette*:

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James B. Milner, of this place, died this morning at 6 o'clock. This is the saddest stroke of affliction that the people of this town have ever known. Mr. Milner came to this place in 1875, and commenced the mercantile business, and by his energy and business qualifications has made his business profitable, and has accrued many warm friends, who are deeply grieved at his death. In all public enterprises connected with this town and county he was foremost, and never hesitated to contribute, both with his money and time. He was forty-eight years old, and leaves four grown children, one married daughter and son, and one single daughter and son. His remains will be carried to St. Joseph, Mo., and buried with his wife who died on the first day of December last.

St. Louis Globe Democrat, Friday, December 29, 1882

Burned Buildings

Prescott, Ark., Visited by a Destructive Conflagration

Special Dispatch to the Globe-Democrat

Little Rock, Ark., December 28—one of the largest and most disastrous fires ever visited South Arkansas occurred at Prescott, county seat of Nevada County, this morning. Prescott is a flourishing little city of some 1,200 or 1,500 inhabitants, and situated on the Iron Mountain Road, ninety-six miles south of Little Rock. The fire broke out at 1:30 in the store of S. Winter & Co, and there is no doubt that it was the work of an incendiary. The property destroyed is as follows: Southern Hotel, Mrs. Winter's hotel, S. Winter & Co.'s storehouse; Reppy building, occupied by Wiley Webster, grocer, and Shackelton & Co., milliners; Cassidy building, occupied by Frank Cassidy's saloon and Lachles restaurant; Barnes building, occupied by Wm. L. Webb, grocer; Ward & Gillan, saloon and Frederick's barber shop; Norman Burns & Co., M. Belzar, fancy grocer; W. L. Gaines, shoe store; J. H. Daniels, law office; Bell building, occupied by Krone and Oppenheimer; Jones building, occupied by Mr. Shankles, fancy dry goods store; Dio Lewis, jeweler, and Moore & Wilson's butcher shop. Here the fire was checked on the north side of West Main Street. The flames, however, at the Norman building, jumped across the street to Thad Gill's building, occupied by Brock & Bros, grocers; Mmes Norman and Burns, fancy notions, and Joe Kershaw, baker and restaurant. Here Atkinson and Ross's brick block stayed the flames again. On West Front Street, adjoining the Gill building, King's tin shop, H. Kershaw's grocery, Reprecht's restaurant, A. J. Cummings' grocery store and James Higgin's shoe store were burned as named, the fire in this direction being checked by Pipkin's drug store.

St. Louis Globe-Democrat, St. Louis, MO., Tuesday, March 27, 1883

Disaster of a Day

Blown Up With Dynamite

Little Rock, Ark., March 26 - A special from Prescott, Ark., says the boys' preparatory department of the high school was blown up at 3 o'clock this morning by dynamite, with which experiments had been made. The explosion awakened the town and produced great excitement. Nobody was hurt.

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A Personality Type – by Don Mathis

When I was a kid, Mom and Dad both insisted I learn how to type. “You’ll always have a skill to fall back upon,” they said. But in high school in the 1960s, typing was considered a ‘girly’ skill.

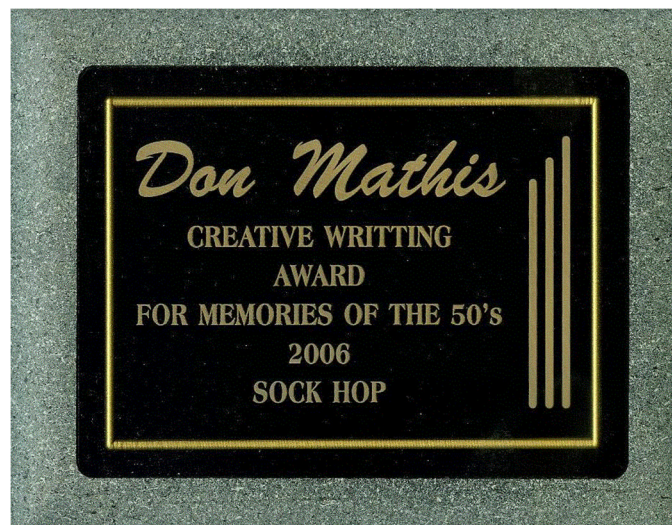
“What are you going to take next,” I was chided by school friends, “Home Economics?” There was no way then that I could see myself cooking and cleaning house. Although it perturbed me at the time, little did I know that 25 years later I would become a stay-at-home dad.

Mathematics was difficult in 10th grade, so was English and science, and sports didn’t interest me at all, so office education became my career by default. Again, little did anyone realize that 25 years later, with the advent of computers, everybody would be expected to know how to type.

Working with letters later developed into working with words. Although English was hard in high school, I found it easy in college. And courses in literature led to business correspondence, creative writing, persuasive composition, and then journalism.

And the way with the written word led to familiarity with the spoken word. Which led to a long-standing involvement with the San Antonio poetry community.

Nowadays, several times a year, I am honored (and often paid) to go on stage and share my words. It is sometimes competitive (in contests), sometimes growth-inducing (performing for large crowds with the spotlight in my eyes), but always creative. And I love it!



Although I have received recognition several times for an innovative way with words, it is unlikely that I will receive another award for "Creative Writing."

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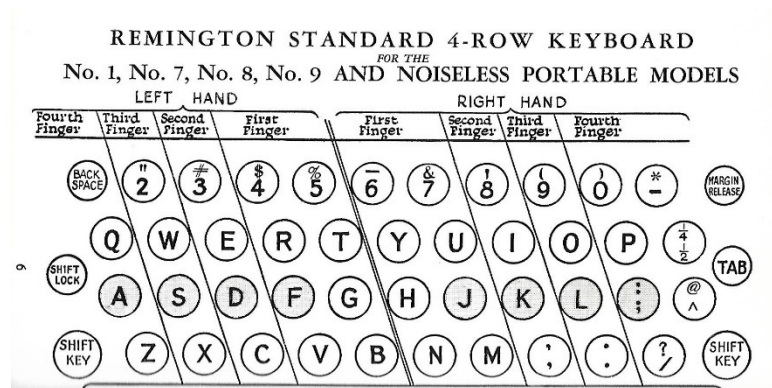
Natural High – by Don Mathis

I write when I like
Lay down my pen pick it up again
Write to my son or congressman
or fire a letter to the editor
Mail it and then forget
Until another idea
compels me to scamper for paper
Or the phone rings on my answering machine
"We need your OK to run your essay"
Or I glean a magazine
and see my handle in the contents table
Maybe a legislator will answer my letter
Or I get a warm greeting at the poetry reading
I smile for a while
and sigh – A Natural High

Thank you, Don, for all the articles you submit for our enjoyment. Several readers have written to me praising your work.

I can relate to what you wrote about typing being considered a “girly” skill back in the 1960s. I graduated from high school in 1961, and in our school, very few boys took typing. I was one of only four boys in my typing class. I remember having to type the familiar sentence—“Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country” over and over again. I never did learn to type nearly as fast as the girls, but looking back, I am glad I took the course. It really helped me during my working career and even now that I am retired. At least I don’t have to use the “hunt and peck” method.

I remember going to our family doctor one time in Prescott. At that time the doctor typed up his prescription for me to take to the drug store. He had to use the “hunt and peck” method and I thought to myself—I’m not nearly as educated as he is, but I can sure beat him typing. ----- Jerry



This diagram came from an instruction booklet for Remington typewriters that was in a box of stuff I purchased at an estate sale. These models of Remington typewriters were popular in the 1930s and 1940s.