

Jerry McKelvy's
WAY BACK WHEN
August, 2025

LOG ROLLING IN NEVADA COUNTY

When we hear the term “log rolling”, we usually think of some contest in which contestants try to stay standing on a floating log without falling off. That sport originated back in the days when logs were sometimes floated down a river to a sawmill. Men would have to walk on the floating logs to keep them in place. Floating logs would spin making it hard for someone to stand on them without falling off.

In the late 1880s, farmers in this part of the country had log rollings in which neighbors would get together to help each other with the difficult job of removing logs from their cultivated fields. Log rollings were frequently mentioned in local news columns which made we wonder why they had to remove logs from their fields. Why would there be timber growing in a cultivated field? We must remember that the area was forested when the settlers first came here and they had to convert part of their land from a forest to a cultivated field for crops. The good trees would be cut and taken to sawmills, but some of the cull trees and small trees would be left standing. Also, farmers sometimes opened up a new field for crops which meant the trees had to be removed. Crops usually did better on new ground than on land which has been cultivated for several years.

I finally found more about log rollings in a book by Frank Owsley called *Plain Folk of the Old South*.

According to that book, farmers did not remove all trees from their fields. They would leave some trees standing and “girdle” them with an axe so that the tree would die and planted their crops around the standing trees. There was little underbrush back then because they burned the land each year in the winter. Some of the deadened trees would catch on fire and fall or be blown over in storms. In the spring, the farmer and his sons would cut off the branches of the fallen trees and pile the branches. They would then cut the fallen trees into ten- or twelve-foot lengths.

The neighbors would then be invited to a log rolling. They would bring hand spikes which were used to lift the log. The spikes were usually hickory saplings about five feet long and about three inches in diameter with the ends tapered to make a handle. This would be placed under the log with a man on each side of the hand spike. Two or three pairs of able-bodied men were needed to move a log depending on the size of the log. When a signal was given, the men would lift the log and carry it to the log pile. It was similar to the way pallbearers carry a casket at a funeral. Even though the job was called “log rolling”, the logs were actually carried. The only time they were rolled was when they were rolled from the hand spikes onto the log heap.

Log rollings were like a social gathering of men. Work always goes better if there is plenty of help. After all the hard work was done, the men were treated to a good meal

WAY BACK WHEN

cooked by the farmer's wife. Farmers in those days helped each other with jobs like log rolling, barn raising, corn shucking, and woods burning. Here are just a few items from the Nevada County papers about log rollings:



Falcon (Feb. 24, 1884)—Log rolling and oat sowing is the order of the day.

Willisville (Mar. 10, 1886)—Log rolling is in order. Not more than half of the neighborhood has rolled yet.

Laneburg (Mar. 31, 1886)—Mr. Elijah Matthews had the boss log rolling in this part of the county recently. He had between forty and fifty hands and it took two days to pile his logs.

New Home (2-2-1887)—Sociables and candy-pulling seem to be a thing of the past and log rolling is the sport of the season.

(3-21-1888)—Mr. B. T. Loe, who bought Uncle Nat Martin's farm, had a big log rolling at which forty hands worked. In a little over a half day, they rolled logs off 30 acres of new ground and 13 acres of fresh land.

Bodcaw (4-12-1889)—The storm last Saturday blew down a great deal of timber in our fields and we will soon have to give a log rolling.

Laneburg (2-12-1891)—Log rolling, or more properly speaking, log lifting, is about the heaviest work that falls to the lot of poor fellows. It is the chief attraction at present. But for the chicken pie and other temping viands prepared on such occasions, the work would be almost unendurable.

The last mention I found in the newspapers of a log rolling in Nevada County was in 1918.

EATING TOO MUCH

I think we are all probably guilty of overeating on occasion, especially when the food served is very tasty or it is something we don't usually eat. It might be at a family reunion, some type of party, or a holiday feast. It seems food tastes better when there is a crowd

WAY BACK WHEN

present enjoying it. Sometimes, we suffer from the after effects of overeating and wish we had not eaten so much.

There are many words that are sometimes used to describe overeating. Here are some of the more common things you might hear.

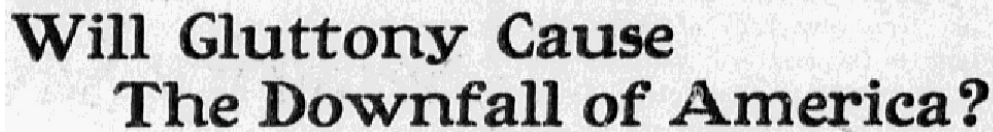
Binging
Gorging
Pigging out
Stuffing oneself

Gluttony
Eating like a horse
Blimping
Wolfing

Over-indulging
Packing it away
Gormandize
Splurging

Gluttony is considered a sin in many religions because it shows a lack of self-control. I found the word “glutton” used twice in the King James version of the Bible and in both instances, the word drunkard is in the same verse.

Early newspapers are filled with articles about gluttony. Here are two headlines from 1910 and 1917:



**Will Gluttony Cause
The Downfall of America?**



**GLUTTONY HASTENS DEATH
BY WEARING OUT ORGANS**

The city of Berlin, Germany even went so far as to put a tax on gluttony in 1922. The cost of a normal meal at a restaurant was determined by the city each month. If the total bill for a meal exceeded that amount, the excess was taxed at 25%.

Henry Ford was known for his unusual eating habits. He was a mostly a vegetarian often eating what he called “roadside greens” which other folks called weeds. He often carried nuts, raisins, and carrots in his pocket. He would sometimes offer a carrot to someone and they would munch on carrots while discussing business. He never drank cold water and believed a person should not eat until 1 p.m. and should avoid all starches and sweets. His advice was “eat only when hungry, and then eat less than you feel you need. He said “Try this for a week and I’ll guarantee you’ll feel much healthier”.

Henry Ford viewed the body as a machine and believed it should be fueled with the right fuel. He said most people ate three times as much food as they really need. He said we would not think of putting three times the amount of fuel in our vehicles than it really needed, but people didn’t mind spending three times what they should on food when it was not really needed. He felt that over-eating caused brain sluggishness and poor concentration of his employees. He was the founder of the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit which had a Department of Dietetics in 1922 where patients were taught how to eat properly. The hospital also had a no smoking policy because Henry Ford felt that

WAY BACK WHEN

smoking was unhealthy. The first twins were born at the hospital in 1922 and were named “Henry” and “Ford”.

Henry Ford was a master at efficiency in his factories where vehicles were produced on an assembly line. He used these same ideas of efficiency in the planning of the Ford Hospital. He became one of the world’s richest men but lived a simple life. He once said, “I don’t see why I shouldn’t live to be a hundred. It will be my own fault if I don’t.” He was rarely sick and in good health up until the end. He died suddenly in 1947 at age 83 from a cerebral hemorrhage.

My advice, which I admit I do not always follow, is to try to refrain from over-eating. It will be better for our health and we will avoid the temporary misery that comes from “pigging out”. When we do find that we have “stuffed ourselves” too much, perhaps we should pray for forgiveness for our lack of self-control.

We also need to express our thanks for having so much food. Many people in other parts of the world do not have enough food to eat due to such things as poverty, wars, famines, diseases, etc. It was recently reported that Americans waste about 30 to 40 percent of the food we grow. Many leave food on their plate when they eat out at restaurants. Reports show that 27 to 53 percent of the food served in our nation’s schools is thrown away. Recent reports show that nearly 75% of American adults are obese or overweight and 20% of American children are overweight with the number increasing each year. Maybe we need to take Henry Ford’s advice and watch what we eat (and how much we eat).

500 LASHES

Back about 1900, it was common in Arkansas for hanging to be used as a method of punishment for crimes and sometimes citizens would take matters into their own hands if they felt it was needed. Mobs would sometimes take a prisoner from the jail and carry out their own form of justice. Usually, the people doing such were unidentified and never had to answer for taking the law into their own hands.

An innocent man almost lost his life in Camden in 1901. Mrs. Clara Watson, the 24-year-old wife of a local farmer, gave a sworn statement accusing Will Bussey, a Negro, of raping her. Will Bussey was brought to trial in Ouachita County circuit court. Based on Mrs. Watson’s sworn statement identifying Will Bussey as the man who had assaulted her, the jury only deliberated 15 minutes before finding him guilty. He was sentenced to be hanged later the same month. Many people in Camden thought that he was innocent of the crime.

About three weeks later, Mrs. Watson issued another sworn statement saying she had falsely accused Will Bussey and that he was innocent. She said her conscience would not let her allow a man to die for something he did not do. She said her husband, Tom

WAY BACK WHEN

Watson, had forced her to make the statement, threatening to kill her if she did not do it. She said her husband had made up the story because Will Bussey would not help him work in his crop. Tom Watson was then arrested and placed in jail.

After hearing that Tom Watson had made up the story, a committee of citizens in Camden took Tom Watson from jail and gave him 500 lashes on his bare back. He was then placed in a railroad boxcar going south and was told not to get off until he had crossed the state line.

Based on the new statement by Mrs. Watson, Gov. Davis suspended the sentence of Will Bussey for 30 days and instructed the court in Camden to decide what was right and proper in the case. A new trial was scheduled, but the state supreme court ruled that there was not enough evidence to secure a conviction of Will Bussey.

I found a later news article that stated that Tom Watson and his wife had decided to move to Texas so I guess he survived the whipping and returned to Camden for a while.

This story was printed in newspapers all over the country. Most felt Tom Watson got what he deserved, although I can't imagine someone being whipped that many times. That type of punishment was common during the Revolutionary War period. British soldiers who were being punished were sometimes whipped up to 500 lashes, but the American army limited the number to 39 lashes. The instrument used was usually a flexible cane.

There was no mention of any charges being brought against the men who removed Watson from jail and gave him the lashing.

Here is a portion of Mrs. Watson's second sworn statement printed in the Arkansas Gazette June 14, 1901.

the said Will Bussey did commit a rape upon my person, and upon my testimony he was convicted and sentenced to be hanged June 29, 1901. Since the said trial I have suffered the tortures of the damned from the lashings of a guilty conscience and now desire and do hereby declare that my said testimony was wholly false and untrue and I hereby retract it in every detail. Will Bussey never committed any rape upon me, nor did he attempt ever at any time such a thing. I made the statement under the influence of my husband, and the whole thing was a scheme devised, planned and concocted by my husband, Thomas Watson, to punish Will Bussey because he would not work for us in our crop. My husband told me if I did not swear that Will Bussey ravished me he would quit me and lastly threatened to kill me if I did not acquiesce in his scheme. I do not want the negro Will Bussey punished at all, as he is innocent of any crime toward me. I have prayed that God will forgive me for this evil thing I have done, and shudder when I think how near I came being a murderess.

"I have lived in Ouachita county, Ar.

WAY BACK WHEN

DOG DAYS OF SUMMER

We are officially in what are known as “the dog days of summer”. Most sources say the 40-day period from July 3 to August 11 are the dog days of summer. It is the peak of the summer when temperatures are high. There are fewer outside activities and people mainly just try to endure the heat and dream of the cooler days of fall.

It was once thought that dogs went mad more frequently during the hottest time of the year and some think that is the origin of the phrase “dog days of summer”. Most think it comes from the Dog Star called Sirius which during this time of the year rises just before the sun in the east and is the brightest star second to the sun. Ancient Greeks and Romans thought that bright star along with the sun was the cause of the extremely hot temperatures. Some thought the appearance of the Dog Star caused droughts, disease, bad luck, and general unrest among the people.

Thanks to air conditioning, most of us are not as affected by the high temperatures of summer, but there are many who must work outside during this time of the year. They must be careful to take breaks and stay hydrated to avoid heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

We did not have air conditioning when I was growing up on the farm. We did have good shade trees in the yard where we spent much of the hottest part of the day. I remember how difficult it was to get to sleep on a hot summer night. I sometimes slept on our front porch on a cot with a mosquito net draped over it. It was much cooler there than inside the house and I usually had two or three dogs to keep me company. Most of our garden vegetables had already been picked and canned before the hot days of summer, but we still had outside work to do such as hauling hay and hauling pulpwood.

During the hot summer days, our dogs liked to dig holes in the yard trying to find a cool place. The bottom of the hole was cooler and felt good to them. Even though there is some question about the origin of the phrase “dog days of summer”, on our farm it was the time of the year when our dogs dug deeper holes trying to stay cool while we sat under the sycamore trees wishing for the first signs of fall. It was also the time of year when, if we were lucky, we could enjoy one of those sweet Bluff City watermelons.



WAY BACK WHEN



Friendship Day, August 3 – by Don Mathis

National Friendship Day is celebrated on the first Sunday in August. It is a day to nurture relationships; call up an old friend, make a new one. Celebrate with your friends doing the things you like to do.

A friend shows respect. A friend can show displeasure without anger. A friend can offer criticism without being abusive. A friend is a memory maker. A friend can share feelings and fears in complete confidence.

A true friend can help elaborate on an idea, can encourage reasoning, and provide introspection – and still disagree with you.

Friends compliment and complement each other. They share their strengths in the other's weakness. A friend will help with no expectation of reward. Communication is essential in a friendship.

A relationship without trust is not a friendship. Sharing is important – as is the ability to share the friendship. One does not have to be all things to be a friend. He or she can allow that friend to be with others without jealousy.

The basis of a friendship can change, people can change. But if the friendship remains, it will be that much stronger.

Make room for the friends in your life and celebrate the potential for friendship wherever you go.