

Jerry McKelvy's  
**WAY BACK WHEN**

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**THE MERRY WIDOW HAT CRAZE**



Merry widow hats for women were made popular by a 1907 operetta in which an actress named Lily Elsie appeared. Women across the country began wearing very large extravagant hats called merry widow hats. Some were over two feet wide and covered with all kinds of adornments.

Women usually wore hats to church on Easter Sunday and some preachers complained saying many in the audience could not see the preacher and vice versa. Church attendance by men on Easter Sunday declined and many blamed it on the hats. Church pews which could normally seat six people could only seat three due to the large hats the women wore. Churches in one town in New Jersey banned the hats during church services, or at least they requested that the women check their hats at the cloak room and not wear them during services.

The hats even caused some accidents. A man was rushing to catch a train. When he rounded a corner, he was met with the brim of a large merry widow hat. The brim pierced his eye causing him to lose his vision in that eye. The hats required long hat pins to hold them in place and there was some concern that a woman could be injured if she fell while wearing one of the hats. It was said that once the hat was on, it was intended to be left on for the occasion because it would be too difficult to remove it and replace it in public without destroying the woman's hairdo. There were also complaints that the hats took up too much room on elevators and blocked the view of patrons in theaters.

This poem appeared in the July 13, 1908 issue of The Nevada County Picayune.

**The Merry Widow Hats**

I would like to see the budding of the trees,  
I would like to watch the birdlets as they float down the breeze  
I would like to see the sunlight on the knolls and on the flats,  
But the girls obstruct my vision with their merry widow hats.

When a girl would cross a doorway, people view her with alarm,  
For she has to go in sideways with her head beneath her arm.  
When two maidens take a ramble on either side of the street,  
They are widely separated but their merry hats will meet.

Ah! the sorrows of their husband who would kiss his only own,  
For he has to do his kissing by distance long.  
In the church, the merry women in their merry tiles,  
Drive their melancholy husbands to the middle of the aisles.

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In the home, a weeping father seeks the cellar's quiet gloom  
For upstairs, the merry widow's headgear takes up all the room.  
There he is joined by neighbors who unite in crying "rats"  
When the conversation touches on those merry widow hats.

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### **NEWS ITEMS ABOUT PRESCOTT FROM VARIOUS NEWSPAPERS 1885 TO 1897**

#### Oct. 17, 1895—The Arkansas Gazette

Ad for the Wilson Hotel in Prescott—"Strictly first-class in every respect". Rates--\$1.50 per day.

#### May 16, 1896—The Arkansas Gazette---Prescott Paragraphs

Many merchants in this town buy their goods in Little Rock. Hogs are running at large in the streets. The Picayune insists on the enforcement of the ordinance regarding stock.

#### Sept. 19, 1896—The Van Buren Press

Mrs. Eugene Cheatam died at Prescott Monday evening. She is the daughter of Capt. W. R. White, former clerk of Nevada County, and sister of Mrs. Thomas C. McRae.

#### Nov. 18, 1896—The Arkansas Gazette

We report the death of W. C. Hatley, one of Prescott's oldest citizens, of heart failure. He was a former merchant at Caney before moving to Prescott. He was a member of the Cumberland Presbyterian church, an affectionate husband and father, and an honest and upright gentleman.

#### Dec. 26, 1896—The Arkansas Gazette

An article entitled "Prescott—A Peach" describes the town. Population is 3,000. Has good land and prosperous farmers. About 60 first-class business houses including dry goods (J. T. Brooks, B. F. Brown, McMillan & Bros., and W. B. Waller); grocery (W. T. Hart, J. M. White, White Bros., H. Kershaw); millinery (Mrs. E. A. Shankle and Miss Mollie Hinkle); drugs (Hugh Moncrief, George W. Terry, J. D. Howell, Hamilton Drug Co.); livery (John Shiners, C. B. Moore, Horn & Fore); others (Sharp & McDonald, Ira Gee Hardware and Furniture, Higgins Shoe Store); wholesale (Hamilton, McMillan & Co, one of the largest wholesale and retail dry goods businesses in south Arkansas); the cheese factory, W. Abbot's market, two barber shops, The Nevada County Picayune; lawyers (Thompson and Greeson, T. C. McRae, G. R. Hamby, Jay Burns, C. C. Hamby, Guy Nelson); doctors (R. L. Hinton, E. R. Armistead, E. R. Arnold, J. Harris, Hesterly, McAnulty, and J. C. Brown); churches (Episcopal, Baptist, and Presbyterian). Prof. Caraway is principal of the high school with Maud Hays as assistant. Ozan Lumber Co. and Tracy Thomas Lumber Co. employ 150 men. J. W. Bake is the opera house manager.

#### Feb. 24, 1897—The Arkansas Gazette

To celebrate Arbor Day, students at Tom Allen High School planted a tree in honor of Little Rock—"The City of Roses" with a population of 40,000.

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### June 13, 1897—The Arkansas Gazette

Seven crews are working putting up telegraph lines to Texarkana. The crews are headquartered at Prescott now.

### June 25, 1897—The Forrest City Times

Mrs. P. W. Hall of Prescott died from a dose of strychnine taken by mistake.

### July 5, 1897—The Daily Texarkanian

Eight business houses were destroyed by fire on West Front and West Main streets between Citizens Bank and Howell's Drug Store. Some of those destroyed were a vacant building next to the bank, W. T. Hart grocery, J. B. Higgins shoe store, J. H. Kershaw's grocery, H. A. Hamilton & Co. dry goods store, the brick post office, J. R. Henderson's confections and ice cream store.

### July 31, 1897—Osceola Times

The mysterious death of a farmer near Prescott named Fuller three weeks ago was cleared up by the deathbed confession of the killer named Graham. He became overheated running from the scene and died shortly after confessing to the killing.

### Nov. 8, 1897—The Arkansas Gazette

John Kimbrough, a laborer at Tracy Thomas Lumber Co. mill was crushed to death when a stack of lumber fell on him.

### Nov. 10, 1897—The Forrest City Times

A patent was granted to James H. Ellis of Prescott for burglar and fire alarms.

### Jan. 28, 1898—The Forrest City Times

Charles Clyburn was convicted of the murder of Deputy Sol Rollins of Clark Co in March 1897. The trial was moved to Prescott on a change of venue.

### April 16, 1898—The Arkansas Gazette

Prescott is soon to have a system of water works and electric lights.

### June 28, 1898—The Arkansas Gazette

A fisherman named Ripple who lived at Boughton disappeared. He was last seen attending to his trot lines on the river. The next day, a notice was found on his door stating that he had gone to Texas. It was suspicious because the man could neither read nor write. It is believed that he was murdered and his body thrown in the river.

### Sep. 2, 1898—The Sharp County Record

Charles Clyburn was hanged in Prescott. Before his execution, he made a speech to a large crowd advising them to vote against whiskey saying that it was the cause of his death today. He told the crowd to "shun bad company and leave whiskey alone".

### Nov. 2, 1898—The Daily Texarkanian

Ozan Lumber Co. mill in Prescott burned.

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Nov. 15, 1898—The Daily Texarkanian

The Prescott Times newspaper is sold to Messrs. Mack and Hunter.

Dec. 14, 1898—The Arkansas Gazette

A fire on Front Street destroyed five buildings north of Nevada County Bank.

Jan. 6, 1899—The Sharp County Record

Prescott has organized a law-and-order league. Its purpose is to “utterly annihilate from the town anything that would intoxicate, including all sorts of wine and cider”.

Jan. 14, 1899—The Arkansas Gazette

Prescott is on a boom. There is not a vacant house or business and there is great demand for both.

Feb. 21, 1899

County Judge J. W. Atkinson passes away. The headline reads “Died in the Harness”.

April 25, 1899—The Daily Texarkanian

Fire destroyed Prescott Hardware, and stores of J. L. Eagle, W. V. Tompkins, T. C. McRae, Pittman & Milburn, W. B. Waller and the Masonic Lodge, Knights of Pythias, and Woodmen of the World.

Aug. 13, 1899—The Arkansas Gazette

The Greeson opera house is completed with over 500 plush chairs—one of the best in the state.

Aug. 26, 1899—The Osceola Times

The city water works and electric light plant at Prescott was destroyed by fire.

Sept. 29, 1899—The Daily Texarkanian

A peculiar noise like an explosion was heard in Hope, Prescott, Nashville, Buckner, and Lewisville. There was no explanation for the noise. It was assumed to be a meteor.

Nov. 1, 1899—The Times Journal

A patent was granted to O. F. Whitten for a quilting frame attachment for sewing machines.

Nov. 13, 1899—The Daily Texarkanian

A fire on West Front St. destroyed Nichols Bros. general store, Hugh Moncrief’s drug store, and A. L. Blakely dry goods store. The fire was stopped by the thick wall at Citizens Bank.

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**In Memory of Daniel Hearnberger Mathis  
(Born April 19, 1921, in Fordyce, AR - Died February 22, 1991, San Antonio, TX)**

My dad liked to water the lawn. No matter where the Army stationed him in his 20-year career, the post would have a Yard-of-the-Month contest. The winner would get to display a sign for 30 days; it was like a trophy. Daddy would mow, water, seed, fertilize, and put new topsoil on the yard.

He would have us kids pull weeds and rake clippings. Sometimes he'd ask us to hand water the spots the sprinkler didn't reach. In no time, we would be playing "Zorro," creating "Z" shapes with the water hose.

There were never any litter or dog droppings in Sergeant Mathis' yard. That lawn would look as neat and trim as the crew-cuts he gave us. Daddy never won the coveted sign, but he never gave up trying.

Even after he retired, Daddy would trim, edge, and water his lawn – especially water. In his old age, he used a leaf blower to gather leaves. Sometimes he would 'rake' leaves with a stream of water from the hose – even in the rain!

I think he knew how to have fun. He would wear a raincoat and rubber boots and wash the leaves downhill in the pouring rain. He didn't care what the neighbors would think.

When he died, I asked the folks at the Fort Sam Houston graveyard to install a water sprinkler near his grave. It would be a fitting memorial for the old man, a compensation for the Yard-of-the-Month Award that he never won. But I guess that was too much to ask of a National Cemetery.

Sometimes when it rains, I kick off my shoes and go outside. I watch the rivulets run across the lawn. I walk in the squishy mud and rinse my feet in the torrent by the curb. I marvel at the forces of nature. I thank God for watering my lawn.

And I think of my dad.

*Water sprinkler near the grave of  
Sgt. Daniel Mathis (Don Mathis'  
father)*

*Fort Sam Houston Military Cemetery  
San Antonio, Texas*



# WAY BACK WHEN

## A STRANGE ADDICTION

I watched a show on TV recently about a woman from Kentucky named Margaret who has a strange addiction. She is addicted to bee stings. She first started this to get relief from painful arthritis. She, and many others, believe that bee venom helps those who suffer from arthritis.

Margaret says she allows herself to be stung up to 100 times per week, usually about 15 times per day. She allows the bees to sting her on various parts of her body included arms, legs, hips, fingers, her forehead, and even the tip of her nose. She says it is not as painful as you might think. There is some mild swelling and itching, but she swears that this helps relieve her pain.

She has her own bee hive so that she will have an adequate supply of honey bees. She said she feels bad about the bees dying after a sting and she tries to find older bees to use. She is so dependent on bee venom that she carries a jar in her purse containing a few bees in case she needs a dose of bee venom.

Her husband was worried that it might be dangerous for her to do this and convinced her to see a doctor. The doctor told her that she might develop an allergy to the venom which could cause her throat to swell so that she couldn't breathe and recommended that she quit the bee sting therapy. Margaret told the doctor that there was no way she was going to quit, but did say she would try to cut back to no more than ten stings per day.



This is at Lester in Ouachita County. I took this picture several years ago. The building is still there, but all the artifacts have been removed.