

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

"TAKING YOU BACK TO THE GOOD OLD DAYS"

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FROM TICK HILL TO NUBBIN HILL Surveying Nevada County Cemeteries By Jerry McKelvy

Our surveys started about 1997. I guess what started it all was the fact that as I drove around Nevada County and the surrounding counties doing my job (forest management), I would occasionally come upon an old abandoned cemetery deep in the woods all grown up with brush. Some of these had old grave markers and others just had a few rusty old metal funeral home markers, but one could tell from depressions in the ground that several graves were there.

I had become interested in genealogy which happens to many of us as we get older. I knew that somewhere there was probably someone who was wondering about some of these people buried in these lost cemeteries. Perhaps they had researched the names of some of their old ancestors, but had no idea what happened to them or where they were buried.

I began to take a few minutes to record the names from these old grave markers and document the location of the cemetery. Some of these are "family plots" with just a few graves, all members of the same family. These early settlers failed to realize that these spots might be lost after the family had all passed on or moved elsewhere. Land changes hands over the years and not all landowners care for these old burial places as they should.

Each state has different laws regarding abandoned cemeteries. In some states, the cemetery must have more than five graves to be considered a cemetery. If there are fewer than five graves, the landowner can file papers to have the graves removed to a public cemetery if certain procedures are followed. In my opinion, a landowner should be required to protect these burial places and all known cemetery locations should be on record at the courthouse. When land is sold, some system should be in place so that the buyer is aware of any old cemeteries on the land he is purchasing. This can become a major problem near big cities where land is being developed for shopping malls, housing subdivisions, or major highways. We have a few cemeteries even in Nevada County that were "in the way" when some of our highways were first paved.

The old saying "May he rest in peace" may not apply these days. Today's loggers use huge cutting machines and log skidders to do their work. The workers ride around in air conditioned comfort as they cut and skid logs and are often unaware of the small abandoned cemeteries. Sometimes they accidentally drive into the burial places before they notice them. The great majority of loggers would not damage a cemetery on purpose, but there are a few bad apples in the bunch who don't seem to care about such things. I put these in the same category as the vandals who get their kicks by turning over tombstones in cemeteries and breaking into church buildings.

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Another reason for surveying the cemeteries was that my wife had broken her ankle in 1998 and spent nine weeks in a cast. When the cast was removed, the doctor said she needed to walk to build up strength in that leg which had been immobile for so long. So we killed two birds with one stone—we surveyed the cemeteries and she got some needed exercise at the same time.

Our survey of Nevada County cemeteries took us about two years to complete. At first we only planned to do a few we were familiar with, but soon decided to just do the whole county since the older records were about thirty years old. We spent many weekends and some vacation time doing the field work and I would type up the names at night or whenever I had extra time. My typing skills improved greatly because it had been years since I had done much typing. I'm thankful we have computers, because I would have never made it using a typewriter and an old eraser like we used back in high school. An average size cemetery took us about three hours to record the names and about the same amount of time to type the information in alphabetical order. We usually had to make a second or third trip to the cemetery to double check something. We wanted the records to be as accurate as possible, but still we sometimes made mistakes.

Someone has asked how we found all these cemeteries. I located most of them by using maps. The larger cemeteries are shown on county maps and I was already familiar with most of the roads in the county. I asked people who worked for timber companies if they knew of any old cemeteries on their company land. I also asked deer hunters since they roam around their hunting leases on four wheelers and probably know every inch of the land they hunt on. When I found good information that a cemetery was in a certain area, I checked out the land on aerial photographs, looking for a clump of larger trees and old roads. If I found something that looked suspicious, I visited the spot to see if that was the cemetery. I got pretty good at finding burial places. I looked for large oak trees or large cedar trees usually on a hilltop or close to an old road. I don't claim to have found every burial place in Nevada County, but we have surveyed about 100 cemeteries and recorded over 23,000 names of people buried in Nevada County. These cemeteries range in size from several acres down to one lone grave deep in the woods.

These old grave markers sometimes have quite a bit of information engraved on them. Besides the name and dates, there are such things as the military regiment the person was in, lodges they were members of, the state they were born in, and other such information. This is very helpful for people doing research on these old settlers.

An interesting thing we discovered is that some old grave markers were in very good condition and the engravings could be easily read, while others from the same time period were barely readable or could not be read at all. I guess the old saying is true about getting what you pay for. Some people have the idea that a tombstone will last forever, but the elements will work on these stones and many will gradually become unreadable.

A few grave markers are unique. There are home-made markers with miss-spelled words. Some markers have mistakes in the engravings such as one in Harmony Cemetery that shows the person born on Sept. 31 when there is no such date. Several of the newer

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markers have the likeness of the person engraved on the stone or a likeness of the person's handwriting. We came across one marker in Round Oak Cemetery that reads "murdered by a bush-whacker" and one in Snell Cemetery with the words "He loved God, country, and fox hunting". And we were somewhat shocked to find a baby's grave marker at Snell Cemetery with the nickname "Little S- -t, S- -t" engraved on the stone (with the missing letters).

The earliest marked graves we found in Nevada County dated back to the 1850s. Nevada County was not created until 1871, so when some of these folks died, they lived in Hempstead, Ouachita, or Columbia counties. Most of the older cemeteries have some graves dating back to that time period. I find the older grave markers the most interesting. Some are just tall slabs of granite and others are very elaborate and, I'm sure, were very expensive in those days. There is one marker in De Ann Cemetery about twenty feet tall.

In practically every cemetery, there are numerous unidentified graves. Some are marked with a native sand stone or a piece of petrified wood. Many have no marker at all, but it is obvious that a grave is there. These early settlers lived and died, but we will never know for sure where many of them are buried. Some people couldn't afford a store-bought grave marker in those days and did the best they could. As long as they lived, the family knew where their family members were buried and maybe they intended to put up a stone someday, but never got around to it. Some tried to chisel names or initials on the native sand stones, but most of these have become unreadable. We still wonder who might be buried in the large rock grave at Ebenezer Cemetery, but the answer will probably remain a mystery.

Another thing we discovered was that only a handful of people buried in Nevada County lived to be 100 years old. It is interesting to note that in the olden days, few people made it to 70 or 80 years old. Some of the old newspaper articles call a 70 year old man "one of our oldest citizens" or referred to him as "an aged man". With our modern medicines, the life span has increased greatly.

I know some people think roaming around in a cemetery is a peculiar hobby and some don't want to go to the cemetery until they are carried there, but for those interested in genealogy, a wealth of information can be found there. You can find census records, deed records, copies of wills, and other such information at the court house or library, but it is good to have the final resting place of a person recorded in your family records.

We get inquiries from people all over the United States who have some question about Nevada County cemeteries and we are glad to answer their questions if we can. One lady in Arizona had posted a query on the Internet about her relative who was the first mayor of Prescott and was buried at De Ann Cemetery. I wrote back that I knew the location of his grave. She wanted a picture of his grave marker and sent me money to take a picture for her. That was several years ago and we have been corresponding with her ever since.

Sometimes we can't help, like the time a lady wrote saying we had left her relative out of the records, but in her letter admitted that the relative's grave marker was in the closet at her house and not in the cemetery. How were we to know that? Or the time a lady was desperately trying to find her grandmother's grave in Nubbin Hill Cemetery so she could put

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up a marker. Her mother had told her there was a small stone in the cemetery with the word “Mama” written on it, but she could no longer find it.

Our cemetery project was a lot of hard work, but we felt good about it when we finished. We have provided a source of information for many people who live far away and are not able to visit the cemeteries in person. It makes it all worthwhile when we receive a comment from someone who found a lost relative by using our cemetery surveys.

I think the following poem sort of sums up what our cemetery surveys were all about.

THE RECORDING OF A CEMETERY

By Thelma Greene Reagan

Today we walked where others walked
On a lonely, windswept hill;
Today we talked where others cried
For loved ones whose lives are stilled.

Today we saw where Mom and Dad lay,
We had been there once before
On a day we'd like to forget,
But will remember forever more.

Today our hearts were touched
By graves of tiny babies;
Snatched from the arms of loving kin,
In the heartbreak of the ages.

Today we recorded for kith and kin
The graves of ancestors past;
To be preserved for generations hence,
A record we hope will last.

Today we saw where the grandparents lay
In the last sleep of their time;
Lying under the trees and clouds -
Their beds kissed by sun and wind.

Cherish it, my friend; preserve it, my friend,
For stones sometimes crumble to dust
And generations of folks yet to come
Will be grateful for your trust.

Today we wondered about an unmarked
spot
Who lies beneath this hallowed ground?
Was it a babe, child, young, or old?
No indication could be found.

The McKelvy Cemetery Survey can be found in book form at The Ouachita County Library, the Nevada County Depot and Museum, and the Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives. You can view the surveys on the Internet at the Depot Museum website: <http://www.depotmuseum.org/> You will need to set up an account (which is free) in order to view the cemetery records. Just follow the instructions. They can also be found at: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~arnevada/>, but these are not quite as up-to-date.

“A cemetery is a history of people—a perpetual record of yesterday and sanctuary of peace and quiet today. A cemetery exists because every life is worth loving and remembering—always.” (Author unknown)

CARLETON E. DENNY, AGE 100, OF DELIGHT

This is a reminder to the older readers of this paper that you don't have to completely retire just because of your age. Mr. Carleton E. Denny of Delight, Arkansas wrote at age 86 a book about his father's journey from Michigan to Pike Co., Arkansas. The book is based on a diary his father kept for the year 1891. The book is called *The Diary—The Story of Edgar A. Denny, A young man of the 1880s who fell in love with Pike County, Arkansas.*

Edgar Denny had traveled by train from Michigan to Smithton, near Gurdon. He noticed another railroad track leading to the west and decided to walk the track in that direction. He was impressed with the timber in that area and was told it was even better further west in Pike County. He went there and eventually bought a tract of land and operated a sawmill in that area.

When Mr. Carleton Denny recently celebrated his 100th birthday, friends suggested he write down some of the things he had experienced in his life. So in 2004, just after his 100th birthday, Mr. Denny found himself in front of a computer writing another book about his life in Michigan and in Pike County, Arkansas. He called it *The First Hundred Years.*

It is good to see that some folks are willing to tackle such a project at that stage of their life. They have a lifetime of memories to share with the younger generations. So, if any of you readers feel the urge to do something like this, what are you waiting for?

This was on the last page of *The Diary* (taken from William Cullen Bryant's *Thenatopsia*)

So live that when thy summons comes to join
That innumerable caravan, that moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not like the quarry—slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but sustained and soothed
By that unfaltering trust; approach thy grave
As one who wraps the draperies of his couch
About him and lies down to pleasant dreams.

THE OLD SHED ROAD

*Most articles in this paper have some connection to Nevada and Ouachita counties, but I recently came across an article that appeared in a magazine called *Forests and People* back in 1953. I thought it was an interesting bit of history.*

*As you travel into Bossier City, Louisiana you might notice a street sign that reads *Shed Road*. This is the story of that road and how it got its name. It was considered the most unusual road ever built.*

Northwest Louisiana was settled mostly by people who came in by wagon from Georgia and the Carolinas. These early pioneers found the virgin loamy soil perfect for their homes. While the Red River bottom wasn't considered fit to live in, the soil was fertile. With millions of mosquitoes swarming the bottom, the hardy souls had to keep moving by day and sleep under clouds of smoke at night.

The Red River valley yielded up its rich crops of cotton and produce, but the problem of transportation raised its head. The valley was nine miles wide, and there were no railroads. The problem: How to get the cotton to the port of Shreveport for shipment!

The valley floor was a swampy flat. When it was wet, its soil resembled paste. Mules sank to their bellies, and wagons spun through the slosh to the axles. When rains started in the fall, transportation came to a halt.

The settlers tried building "corduroy" roads with no success. The soft mud could not hold the logs firmly in place and the top of the logs were so slippery the mules lost their footing.

Finally Judge John W. Watkins of Minden secured a special charter from Congress to build an unusual road, one he felt certain would conquer the problem. With the charter in hand and the laughter of his neighbors ringing in his ears, this man built a road in 1874 that opened up commerce again.

The road was a shed, nine miles long, with a highway running through it.

Many people wonder how such a sturdy structure could have been built in such a short time. The reason was its timing. Countless thousands of Irish laborers had been working building railroads in the United States and were looking for something to do. These men answered Judge Watkins' call.

Soon drainage ditches appeared along the right-of-way. Dirt was piled up into an embankment across the nine miles of swampy land. The vigorous Irish workmen cut cypress posts, setting them at 20-foot intervals along the roadside. Two little sawmills in the highlands nearby cut timber for girders, joists, braces, and roof boards. Tying the posts together with joists about 10 feet from the ground, the workers then placed girders across the top of the structure, bending them down like the roof of a box-car. There was enough slant on the roof to shed the water off the road.

Transportation trouble ended. The road stayed dry and hard throughout the year. The chocolate river muck that got "soupy" when wet packed smooth and hard as asphalt.

Judge L. K. Watkins of Minden, (son of the builder), often related with merriment how the mules that regularly made trips over this route would start braying when they came in sight of the shed, for they knew they had easy going the rest of the way.

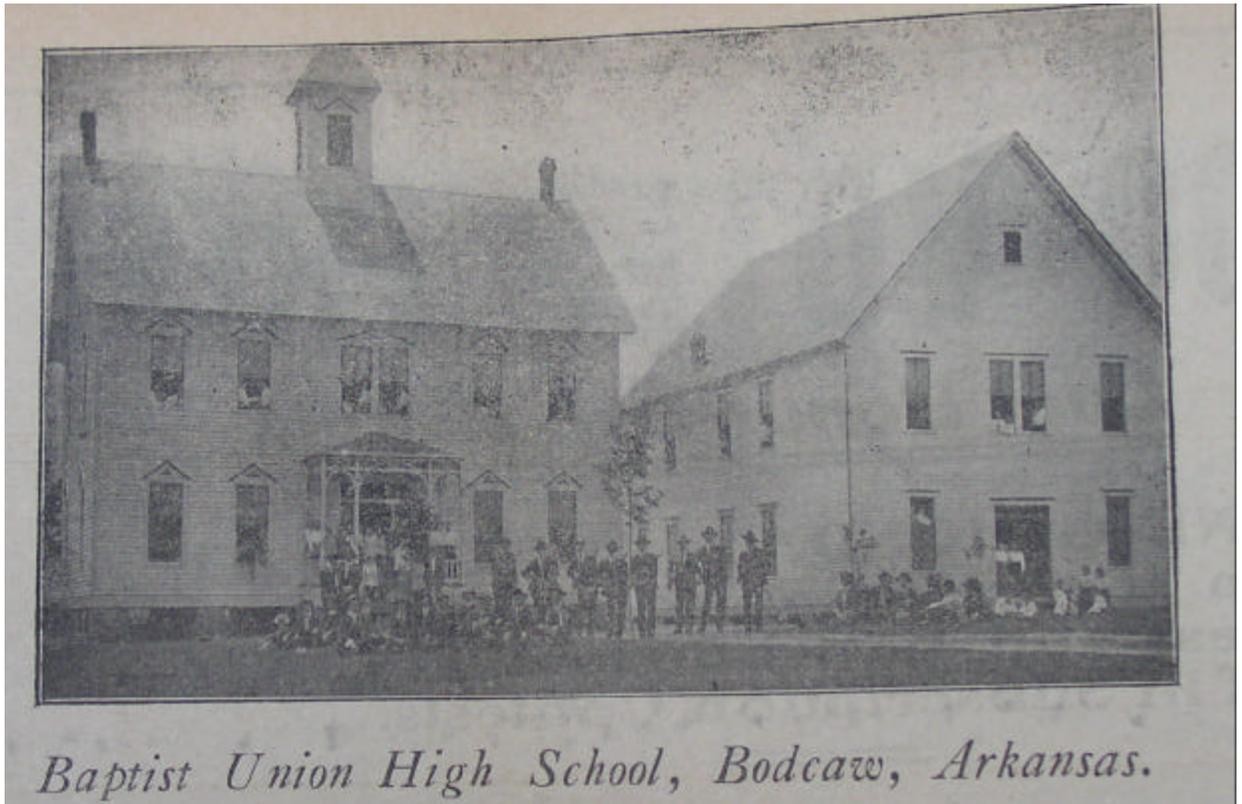
The old shed was a financial success. A four-yoke ox team and wagon was charged a dollar and a half; a four-mule team paid a dollar, the schedule graduating down to a single person who

paid a nickel to walk under the roof. Commerce was willing to pay to keep moving. With upkeep almost nothing, profits totaled \$20,000 or more each year.

For twelve years settlers of the Red River Valley traveled the old shed road to Shreveport, taking their rich produce to market. Then the Vicksburg, Shreveport, & Pacific Railroad was completed in 1886, traversing the state from east to west and paralleling the stagecoach line from Monroe to Shreveport which used the old road. The flourishing town of Fillmore moved to the new town of Haughton which sprang up three miles away on the railroad. Transportation by wagon to the river port ceased, and the shed was abandoned.

The old shed is only a memory with little to honor the ingenuity of its builders. Its grave is marked by a mound, overgrown now with willows and wild flowers. The section of the road still in use looks like any ordinary present-day road where it crosses the Shreveport-Benton highway. The rest can be traced through fields and forest from Scottville east to the hills.

Running almost parallel to the shrubbery-covered embankment that was once the old shed road is a modern concrete highway, carrying drivers who whiz by unaware of the old road that gave comfort to grandma and grandpa.



PICTURE FROM THE NEVADA NEWS IN 1908

UNION HIGH SCHOOL ADVERTISEMENT

Next session begins Sept. 16th, 1907

The best school in Arkansas for boys and girls preparing themselves for business life, or to enter our colleges and universities. Each pupil receives individual instruction. Location most delightful. Buildings new, convenient, and commodious. The teachers from the best Southern families and representing the best Southern culture. Expenses as low as can be offered by the best. For further information or catalogue, contact J. M. Langston, Principal, Bodcaw, Ark.

A FEW FACTS ABOUT BODCAW'S UNION HIGH SCHOOL

It was built in 1899. The school averaged 25 boarders the first two years. There were 40 boarders the third year, 60 the fourth year, 70 the fifth year, and nearly 100 the sixth year. The seventh year was considered a failure due to mismanagement, but in 1907, the school had 279 students and over 100 were boarding students. *(from Nevada County newspaper in 1908)*

RECENT LOCAL NEWS

Sept. 1, 2004—Mrs. Esther Green, 99 of Caney community passed away. Burial was at Caney Cemetery.

Sept., 2004 - Vandalism was reported at Providence Cemetery near Boughton in Nevada Co. Many grave markers were overturned or damaged. This is one of the older cemeteries in Nevada Co.

Sept. 7, 2004 - Mrs. Wilma Ethridge DeWoody, 84 of Camden passed away. Burial was at Bluff City Cemetery.

CORN BREAD MUFFINS

1/2 cup white cornmeal
1/2 cup plain flour
1 tablespoon sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup milk
1/8 cup shortening
1 egg

Blend first five ingredients well. Cut in shortening scissor-fashion until crumbly. Add egg and milk, beating well. Pour into greased muffin pan and bake in preheated oven at 425 degrees for 20 to 25 minutes or until golden brown. Makes 6 muffins.