

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU! --A LOOK AT WILLS

It is interesting to read through some of the old wills recorded at the courthouse. They are a good source of detailed information useful to those who are doing family research.

Some wills are very simple and others are very long and complicated, consisting of several pages. I especially like to read some of the older wills because of the way they are written. For example, the following sentence is taken from a will prepared in 1928 for a resident of Ouachita County.

It is my desire that since I have finished the work assigned to me as best I could that the drapery around my cot be gently folded while my spirit ascends to God who gave it.

Many of these old wills list in detail possessions to be given to various people. I recently found a copy of the will of Nancy Ann Kirk, my great grandmother, who lived a few miles from Bluff City in Nevada County. The will states: *After the payment of my said debts and funeral expenses, I give to each of my children, Dora Haddox, born Kirk, deceased, Marvin Kirk, Marion Kirk, Monroe Kirk, deceased, H. J. Kirk, May Belle Lester, born Kirk, May McKelvy, born Kirk, Bessie Gillespie, born Kirk, Walter Kirk, Alice McAteer, born Kirk one feather bed to be divided equally to each as named above, or their heirs.*

This is good information for those researching family history since it lists the children. I don't know how much a feather bed was worth in 1935, but after dividing the money equally, I doubt if anyone listed received very much.

The will continues: *I give to Laura Belle Kirk all the money I may have on hand and also the following articles, namely:--1 China ware butter dish, 1 yellow top lamp, 3 enamel ware boilers, 1 frying pan, 1 ½ gallon stone jar with lid, 1 rolling pin, 1 stove pan, 2 pairs scissors, 2 smoothing irons, 1 large framed picture, all lard and syrup buckets and cans, all the fruit and fruit jars, 4 small enamel ware pudding pans, 4 tin cake pans, 5 pie plates, 1 white enamel ware water bucket, 2 enamel ware dish pans, 1 cream pitcher, 1 salt box, 1 white water pitcher, 3 aluminum sauce pans, 1 aluminum roaster, 4 one gallon jars, 1 big white stone jar, 1 3 gallon white churn, 6 tablespoons, 2 stone ware bowls, 50 jelly glasses, 4 bowls, 2 cake plates, 1 cake stand, 1 butter dish, 1 fruit stand, 7 dinner plates, 6 cups, 6 saucers, all the hand towels, 1 white bedspread, 5 pairs pillow cases, 16 bed sheets, 1 hand made chest, 1 rocking chair, 1 mattress (newest), 1 feather bed, 4 feather pillows, 1 dresser, 1 folding cot, 2 trunks with all their contents, and 14 quilts to be paid or delivered to her as soon after my decease, but within one year, as conveniently may be done.*

My grandfather, J. C. McKelvy and husband of May McKelvy mentioned in the will, was appointed as the executor of Nancy Ann Kirk's estate.

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I can remember visiting my Aunt Laura Kirk at her home in Bluff City sometime around 1950. She never married and lived in a small frame house on a very sandy hill on what is now Hwy. 387 toward White Oak Lake State Park. I can remember spending nights at her house and sleeping in her feather bed. I remember her trunk filled with all kinds of interesting things, and I'm sure I have probably eaten from some of the kitchenware mentioned in this will. I remember playing with her old battery radio and the ice-box in the kitchen. I was just a kid back then, but wish now that I had asked more questions about her family. We spent lots of time together as I was growing up, but all I have now are memories. I don't even have a picture of her except for one taken of her family when she was a child.

The wills of famous people are interesting to read also. Have you ever wondered what Elvis Presley might have mentioned in his will, or maybe some of the presidents or other famous people? The will of William Shakespeare has been analyzed just about every way possible.

Most people take making a will as serious business, but a few folks are remembered more for what is written in their will than for what they did while alive. Many people who have no family leave their estates to some organization they want to support. Sometimes a person who appeared to be barely getting by will surprise everyone and leave a fortune to some group. Some use a will as a way to publicly embarrass a family member by leaving them a very small amount. One man left one penny to several of his family members because *"that's what they are worth as members of my family"*. One man wrote this: *To my first wife, Sue, whom I always promised I would mention in my will—'Hello, Sue!'* Some even make special provisions in their wills for their pets as one Nevada County man did. After listing who was to receive his land and household items, he made a special provision to leave his Boxer dog named Sandy to his daughter.

THE GREAT STORK DERBY

Charles Vance Millar, a Canadian lawyer and investor was known for his love of jokes and pranks which played on people's greed and hypocrisy. He sometimes would leave dollar bills on a sidewalk and watch from hiding as people would pick up the money and put it in their pockets.

Millar was a successful investor and at the time of his death in 1926, he has accumulated a nice sum of money. He had no children or close relatives. He is remembered more for his will than anything else. His will reads:

This will is necessarily uncommon and capricious because I have no dependents or near relations and no duty rests upon me to leave any property at my death and what I do leave is proof of my folly in gathering and retaining more than I required in my lifetime.

His will was full of pranks. Anti-gambling and temperance advocates were left shares in breweries and race tracks. Three men who were known to despise each other were granted joint lifetime tenancy in Millar's vacation home in Jamaica.

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The strangest part of his will and involving most of his estate became known as The Great Stork Derby. His will stated that the money (close to a million dollars) was to be given to the Toronto woman who gave birth to the most children in the ten years following his death. In the event of a tie, the money would be divided equally.

The government of Ontario attempted to make the will invalid, but Millar, being a lawyer, had prepared it with care. The court cases lasted for ten years. All this time his investments continued to grow and the baby contest continued. This was during the Great Depression and the thought of coming into this much money caused many women to take part in the contest. Nine months after the contest started, the Toronto newspapers began printing scores of which woman was leading in the contest.

His estate was finally settled when over half a million dollars was divided among four Toronto women who each had nine children in ten years. Two other women that had ten children each in ten years received a consolation prize. One had some illegitimate children and the other had some children who died and she could not prove they were not stillborn.

THE MESSAGE IN THE BOTTLE

Here's another strange story which is hard to believe, but supposedly is true. On May 16, 1949, an unemployed man named Jack Wurm was walking along a beach in San Francisco when he spotted a bottle with a piece of paper inside. The note said:

"To avoid all confusion, I leave my entire estate to the lucky person who finds this bottle and to my attorney, Barry Cohen, share and share alike." It was signed by Daisy Alexander and dated June 20, 1937.

As it turned out, Daisy Alexander was somewhat of an eccentric. For years, just to satisfy her curiosity, she dropped bottles with messages off a bridge over the Thames River in London, England. She also happened to be the only child of Isaac Singer, the founder of the Singer sewing machine empire. When she died in 1940 at 80 years of age, she was one of the world's richest women. Her estate was valued at over \$12,000,000. Jack Wurm received over \$6 million dollars from her estate.

Most of us will never have the good fortune to come into a large sum of money, but it's sometimes fun to imagine what it would be like to be rich. For instance, if you suddenly came into a million dollars, would you continue working? Would you give any of it away to those less fortunate? How would you spend it?

Greed is a weakness for many people. I remember an old black and white television show from the 1950's called "The Millionaire". It was about a very rich man named John Beresford Tipton who lived in seclusion on his huge estate called Silverstone. He was ordered by his doctor to choose some form of relaxation. He decided to select someone at random on each episode to receive one million dollars tax free. They never showed the face of the rich man—just a scene of him handing a check to his trusted employee, Michael Anthony, whose job it was to deliver the money to the person selected. The only stipulation

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was that the person could not tell anyone other than his family that he had received the money and could not try to locate the donor. The rest of the show was about how the money changed the life of the person receiving it. It was an interesting plot for a TV show and the series ran for about five years. A million dollars was quite a sum of money back in 1955.

I guess I'd better bring this to a close before I get to dreaming of living in some castle or owning a fleet of Rolls-Royces.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF GORDON H. IRVIN (PART 8) The Story of the Irvin Family near Bluff City in the 1920's

GOING ABROAD

Prescott is the county seat of Nevada County and was the only town near our home. The word "near" is used in a modern sense. It was exactly fifteen miles and that distance, in a wagon over rough roads, is never near to anything. The population of Prescott at that time was about 2,000 consisting of county employees, mill workers, merchants, and their families. Some few hundred feet of its sidewalks were paved but, during rainy seasons, wagons might bog down in the middle of Main Street. The courthouse and county square was enclosed by a large chain that ran through the tops of posts spaced eight or ten feet apart. The chain and posts were used as hitching places for horses and wagons. After sun-up, on Saturdays, you could not find a vacant space around the square, but there was another place in back of Prescott Hardware. I remember this part of town for its strong barnyard stench. You could hitch closer up town, but that would be a mistake on account of the Missouri Pacific railroad tracks being so near and your horses rearing and tearing loose every time a train went by. It was like a circus—you were torn between two attractions, the train going by and the commotion at the hitching racks.

Papa made a trip to town on the average of every two months except in the fall when it was necessary to go more often to sell cotton. At the end of the cotton season we all went to town. This was something very special in our lives and for many days ahead we talked and made plans for the trip and did not sleep well at night. On the eve of the journey, we loaded the wagon with eggs, butter, peanuts, and whatever else we could think of that might sell. Mama packed fried chicken and many other good things to eat and long before daylight we were all up and on our way.

Wagons have no shock absorbers, no springs, and no rubber tires. Mama and Papa sat up front in the spring seat. This seat had two leaf springs that absorb some of the jolts and jogs along the rough rocky road. We children were crowded into the back where we nursed our bones. On this one occasion we were allowed fairly free rein because there was not much mischief we could get into cramped in such close quarters. If we became too weary of jolting along, we might hop out and walk behind the wagon. We often did this to warm up when it was cold in the early morning. It took about four hours to make the trip one way.

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Landmarks along the journey were remembered from year to year and pointed out as we approached and slowly passed them by. Caney Creek marked the limit of our community and of things familiar to our sight. This creek, so small in summer it might be waded without wetting the knees, could be treacherous after heavy rains. Its turgid waters often reached from hill to hill so that it was difficult to determine just where all the culverts and bridges were. Indeed, a bridge or part of it might be washed away. Thus it was necessary to wade out ahead of the mules to find if the crossing could be made. All this was just part of the excitement and no doubt we children were somewhat let down to find the waters low. Up out of the creek bottom for a few miles the soil was mixed with white gravel. As the road bed eroded the gravel remained and the noise of the iron-tired wagon crunching through these rocks could be heard for great distances. It was on this leg of our travel that we went through a Negro community. There were no colored folks near our home and so they were something of a curiosity to us. Also, from the numbers that gathered at the sound of the approaching wagon, it is evident that we were no less an amusing sight to them as well. It was the custom for us and the colored children to make ugly faces at each other as we passed their house. Mama and Papa pretended not to notice what was going on unless or until a good size colored gal might get so carried away that she would pull up her dress and spank her behind at us. Then Papa would put a stop to our foolishness, but by then we were well past the house anyway.

The Reader Lumber Co. railroad ran near this road for some distance and then crossed it. If a log train was coming, we would race it to the crossing. We didn't do this so much for the sport as we did to see the train go by. Next came Main Springs Campground with its artesian wells. From here on it was almost like being in town to see the painted houses along the way and to read the billboards nailed to the trees and fences. Guthrie's Drug Store had the most signs, but Prescott Hardware had the biggest ones. Once inside the town limits, if you were lucky, you might get to see someone using a lawn mower or better yet, a boy on a pair of roller skates. There were three or four street lights which amused us although they were not lit, it being daylight. As I recall, we did not stray far from our parents while in town and my memory of the sights along the way were more vivid than the town itself. It was, of course, most exciting to hear the trains blow and watch them go roaring through (they did not stop at this small town), and to see the occasional automobiles (the name "car" came into use later) as they popped and smoked and bounced along the rutted streets.

It was at about this time that some city man passed a law saying you drive only on the right side of the road. This was the best laugh the farmers ever had. It was also ridiculous to drive all the way to the corner just to turn around.

None of the children ever thought of having money to spend. However, I did have a nickel once but don't know where I got it. I wanted to buy ice cream in a cone, but didn't know how to ask for it. I just stood around in the drug store for about thirty minutes hoping someone might come in and order one so I could find out how. No one ever did, so I walked out and gave the nickel to Nellie. I don't know what she did with it.

I can imagine how trying this day must have been for Mama and Papa. Most of our supplies had to be bought at this time to last for the whole year. By 4:00 p. m., our wagon

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was loaded with flour, salt, sugar, clothing, tools, and many other items of necessity. The long journey home was of no interest to anyone once past Main Springs Camp and the terribly steep Loudermilk Hill. This hill was so steep and long that the mules could not hold the wagon back even with the wheels locked. It was, in fact, a hard race for them to stay ahead all the way down. Once down to the bottom safely, we each found a sack of flour for our heads and slept the remainder of the way home.

Dresses for the girls would be made by Mama from the yards of material bought and for each of the boys there was a pair of brogan shoes, two pairs of overalls, two pairs of union suits (or long handles) and a cap. How warm and good we felt in those union suits on frosty nights. How exciting the smell of new flannel. It was almost like going to town all over again.

(to be continued)



A photo of Con C. Harvey who was a long-time merchant in Bluff City.

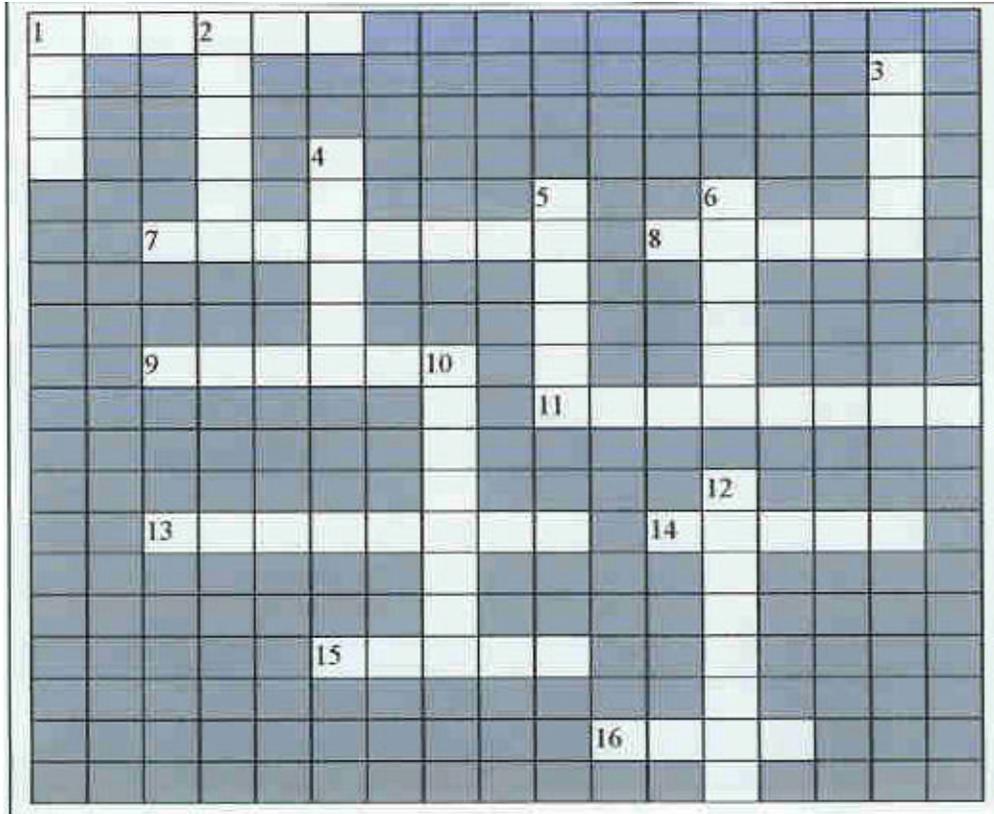
He was born March 8, 1894.

When I was growing up in Bluff City, his store was at the intersection with the door facing Hwy. 24. The store had a connecting door to George Henry's service station on the corner. See the September, 2002 issue for a picture of Mr. Harvey inside this store.

He married Olive Henry, the daughter of Jim Henry and Nora Epperson Henry. His son James Edward "Dick" Harvey once had a dairy bar on the corner where Willie's Gro. is located today.

Mr. Harvey died November 23, 1967 and Mrs. Harvey in 1969. Both are buried in the new section of Bluff City Cemetery.

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This puzzle is mainly for the local folks who live (or once lived) in the Bluff City, Arkansas area or the surrounding area. Check your answers on page 8.

ACROSS

1. Arkansas governor who dedicated White Oak Lake State Park in 1966
7. Historic church in SE Nevada County
8. Local name for the Morris community
9. Reader RR was known as the ____ Trot Line
11. Large cemetery 4 miles southwest of Bluff City
13. County seat of Nevada County
14. Camden has many of these historic structures
15. Bluff City is in this township
16. Town named after Gulley family member

DOWN

1. Old community 4 miles SW of Bluff City in 1900
2. Female character in movie filmed in Nevada and Ouachita counties in 1974
3. Goose Ankle was also known as ____ Hill
4. Dill's Mill made these in 1918
5. Event that happened at Poison Spring in 1863
6. Was once known as Ecore Fabre
10. The Little ____ River is northern boundary of Nevada County
12. Arkansas has 75 of these

Two signs your new car is a lemon: 1. The message in the rear view mirror says "Objects in mirror are better than this piece of junk"; 2. When you approach hitchhikers, they put their thumbs down.

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“WHEN THE ROLL IS CALLED UP YONDER” THE STORY BEHIND THE SONG

James Milton Black was born August 19, 1856 in New York. He acquired an early musical education and knew many of the famous songsters of his day. In 1881, he moved to Pennsylvania and was involved in the Methodist Episcopal church, serving as song leader, Sunday school teacher, and youth leader.

He loved working with young people and tried to win them to Christ. One day, he passed through an alley and met a ragged fourteen year old girl. She was the daughter of an alcoholic. He invited her to his Sunday school class and she began to attend.

However, one day when he took roll, the girl did not respond. Each child had to say a Scripture verse when his or her name was called. James saw a lesson in her silence. He thought of what a sad thing it would be when our names are called from the Lamb’s Book of Life, if one of us should be absent.

After Sunday school, he went to the child’s home to find out why she had not shown up for class. He found her dangerously ill and sent for his own doctor. The doctor said she had pneumonia. Since that was before the days of antibiotics, death was highly likely.

James returned home and tried to find a song to fit the thought of a heavenly roll call, but couldn’t locate one. An inner voice seemed to say, “Why don’t you write one.” And that’s what he did.

*When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more,
And the morning breaks, eternal, bright, and fair;
When the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore,
And the roll is called up yonder, I’ll be there.*

It only took James a few minutes to compose the song with the same words and notes as found in nearly all hymn books. He said, “I have never dared to change a single word or note of that song.”

A few days later, he had the sad opportunity to explain in public how he came to write the song when it was sung at the funeral of the girl whose absence at roll call inspired it.

Answers to crossword puzzle:

Across: 1. Faubus; 7. Carolina (*Methodist*); 8. Caney; 9. Possum; 11. Ebenezer; 13. Prescott; 14. homes; 15. Union; 16. Theo (*after Theodore Gulley*)

Down: 1. Foss; 2. Bertha (*Boxcar Bertha*); 3. Rocky; 4. spokes (*wooden spokes for automobile wheels*); 5. battle (*Civil War*); 6. Camden; 10. Missouri; 12. counties