

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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**Jerry McKelvy's
INTERVIEW WITH MARY KATE SAWYER MORGAN ROBERSON
at her home in Stephens, Arkansas October 18, 2007**

Editor's Note: I was invited down to Stephens to visit with Mrs. Roberson and her son Frank Morgan to ask her some questions about some families I had been researching. She is very alert and has a remarkable memory for someone her age. She is hard of hearing and has not been able to walk for some time. She enjoys reading the paper and working puzzles. While I was there, I asked her the following questions. We could have spent all day there listening to her stories, but after about 90 minutes, we decided to end the interview and let her

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rest. The answers to the questions are taken from the notes I took as I listened to her.

- 1. When were you born?** Feb. 3, 1911
- 2. What was your father's name and occupation?** Luther Sawyer. He was a farmer.
- 3. How many brothers and sisters did you have?** I had two brothers and two sisters.
- 4. Have you always lived at Stephens?** I grew up in the Mt. Prospect community and went to school there. We had to walk about two miles to school at first and later I had to walk five miles to school.
- 5. What was your husband's name?** I was first married to Marcus Morgan and my second husband was Jack Roberson. I was married over thirty years to each husband.
- 6. What were some of the things children did for amusement when you were growing up?** There wasn't much time for recreation. We all worked on the farm picking cotton. We only saw other kids at church and school. After we got older, there were dances to go to and ball games.
- 7. I guess you picked a lot of cotton in those days.** Yes, that was our main crop. My sister once picked a hundred pounds in one day, but I never got quite that much. I was the youngest kid.
- 8. What was your first paying job?** I guess you could say I was a housewife. I did work at the court house once and as a receptionist.
- 9. Did you ever fly in an airplane or ride a train?** Yes, but I wouldn't get on one now for any amount of money.
- 10. Do you remember your family's first automobile?** It was a Model T. My dad sold a bale of cotton to buy gasoline for it. Back then, you had to have the money set aside to buy things. People were scared of cars when they first came out.

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11. We were discussing Old Seminary Cemetery near Stephens. Have you ever been there? I attended several funerals there. It's all grown up now. I remember the Wesson family had the largest marker. The main thing I remember about it was the time we got stranded out there. The car wouldn't start and my husband had a heart condition. I had to leave him in the car and walk a long ways to a black man's house for help. It was very hot. On the way I encountered a large snake in the road. I never wanted to go back there after that experience.

12. Do you remember any church or building near the cemetery? There was a building—either a church or a school after you turned off the main road. I think it had a bell.

13. What was your favorite radio program growing up? We had a small radio, but it mostly got static. We listened to the Louisiana Hayride and other programs, but it was mostly static.

14. What about the first TV show you remember? I remember all the neighbors coming to visit to watch TV. I guess my favorite was "I Love Lucy".

15. What was the first movie you remember? I don't remember the name of it, but it was at Hope, Arkansas when I was visiting my aunt. I was probably five or six years old. All I remember about the movie was a scene in which some ducks were walking up some steps. That has stuck with me all these years.

16. What was the Great Depression like? No money and no jobs. Everybody was in the same boat. This was a period of hard times for just about everybody.

17. What home remedy did you dread the most? We always used castor oil, 666, some tablets called Calumel-? we bought from the Watkins man or the Raleigh man. When kids misbehaved, the threat of a dose of castor oil would usually get them back in line in a hurry.

18. What was the greatest invention in your lifetime? I don't know. I've seen a lot of changes in the last hundred years and wonder what will be next. The ice box was a big change for us. We always had to let things down in the well to keep them cool before we had an ice box.

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19. Did your parents ever complain about any fads—hairstyles or clothing styles—in those days? All the kids worked on the farm. I don't remember anything unusual. I remember one time my sister cut off her long hair. Mother almost cried about that, but a week or so later, my mother had her hair cut the same way.

20. Do you remember any old sayings your parents or grandparent's always said? No.

21. What was the most exciting thing to ever happen at Stephens? I guess it was the time Buck Turner drove the airplane up the street. He was Stephens' most colorful character. He made his money in the oil boom. He would sit around the hotel with his head down like he was asleep and all the while he was listening to the other oil men talking about the oil business. He was able to use the information he learned to make good deals which made him lots of money. He told someone one time about having an airplane, but nobody believed him, so one day he came into town in the plane escorted by four state troopers in uniform. He had landed his plane just out of town on the highway and was escorted up the street to where the Stephens Security Bank is now. He stopped the plane at the bank, got out with some news reporters, walked into the bank and ended up buying the bank that day.

Frank Morgan, her son, remembered the time Buck Turner rode a Palomino horse down the hall of the Stephens school carrying a flag celebrating the end of World War II. All the kids followed him like the Pied Piper from the school up town for a parade. He also told of the time Buck Turner called a taxi from Camden to come to Stephens to take him from the hotel to his home only two blocks away.

22. Have you done much traveling in your lifetime? I've been to almost every state in the United States and parts of Canada. I never made it to Hawaii or Alaska. After my second husband retired, we spent about fifteen years traveling all over the country.

23. What effect did the discovery of oil at Stephens have? Stephens was a very small town until they found oil and one or two days later, there were people coming from everywhere. The first oil boom was about 1924 and then a later one about 1950.

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24. What do you think about the way kids are raised today? The lack of discipline is the big thing. Parents just don't discipline their kids like they did in my day. I don't believe in harsh treatment of a child. Sometimes you can just talk to them and solve the problem.

25. General remarks about her life.-- Life has been good. There were some bad times, but it was mostly good. I've had my share of troubles. I survived cancer twice. I was run over by a semi truck in an accident in which I was the only survivor. They wired me back together which has affected my speech. I've had two broken legs—in 2001 and 2005. I fell in my kitchen in the same spot both times. Don't ever get a broken leg. That's the worst thing that ever happened to me besides the car accident.

Mrs. Roberson mentioned that she has had a birthday party every year for the last five years. We hope that she has many more. We enjoyed our visit with her and thank her for allowing us the opportunity to interview her.

BLUFF CITY SCHOOL DEDICATED September 30, 1929

According to an article in the *Camden Evening News*, the new \$12,000 Bluff City school building was dedicated September 30, 1929.

Several smaller schools in the vicinity had been consolidated into the Bluff City school. These included Gum Grove, Theo, and Terrapin Neck schools.

The featured speaker at the dedication was Governor Harvey Parnell. A delegation of Camden business people also took part with music provided by the Camden Boy's band.

The band had been scheduled to perform at Bluff City earlier but the truck carrying members of the band broke down. The Bluff City people had been promised a return engagement.

The program lasted an hour and a half. Bensburg Music shop in Camden sent a specially tuned piano to Bluff City to be used in the dedication ceremonies. A motorcade consisting of from 25 to 50 cars was expected to make the trip from Camden to Bluff City. At least five cars were required to transport the band.

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Each Camden business was encouraged to send one or more representatives. It was also requested that they bring souvenirs for the 250 students that would be at the dedication.

These were the days of “good will tours”. Business people from the larger towns like Camden and Prescott would visit the smaller towns. Usually a program was presented by the visiting delegation followed by a nice meal provided by the host community.

The program for this occasion included music by the Camden boy’s band, the singing of “America” by the audience led by Carter Haynes, a reading by Miss Miriam Phillips, an address by H. L. Berg, president of the First National Bank, a violin solo by Miss Marie Hardin, a piano solo by Mrs. W. E. McRae, an address by E. W. Copeland, manager of Copeland’s department store, a vocal solo by Richard Broach, and more music by the band and singing led by Carter Haynes. Following the Camden program was the dedication address by Governor Parnell.

CAMDEN’S SHUTTLE TRAINS

Anyone who has lived in Camden, Arkansas knows that occasionally the Ouachita River goes on a rampage, flooding many of the roads in the flat lands northeast of the city.

The river had reached a flood stage of 41 feet in 1927 and it was predicted to reach 42 feet in 1930. This put many of the roads under water for days at a time.

One solution to the problems motorists faced was the use of a shuttle train operated by the Cotton Belt Railroad. It was started in 1929 and was continued during severe flooding in 1930. I think this was probably before the highway over the “river dump” was completed.

These special trains made five round trips per day between Camden and Van Duzer, a point on the railroad near Harmony Grove. The trains carried automobiles and their passengers, but did not carry large trucks. The charge was \$1.00 per auto and the standard charge of 22 cents for each passenger. The trains made five round trips per day and operated only in the daytime. The loading point in Camden was at the

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intersection of the railroad and Washington Street. There was no explanation in the newspaper article as to how the autos were loaded and unloaded at Van Duzer, but probably a special ramp of some kind was installed for this purpose.

The shuttle trains were kept busy during times of high water and allowed travelers a way to continue their trips to and from points northeast of Camden.

SMALL CHILD FOUND ON HIGHWAY **(from the 7-1-1948 issue of the *Prescott Daily Mail*)**

A three year old girl, Marilyn Joyce Hord, who was found in a badly bruised condition near Emmet last night by Beverly Johnson of Hope, was recovered by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. John W. Hord of Ft. Worth, Texas at the Cora Donnell Hospital today at noon.

The child obviously fell from the bed of the truck in which she was sleeping with a 14 year old brother and two small sisters around midnight last night, and her disappearance was not discovered by her parents until they had reached Mt. Pleasant, Texas this morning.

Responding to a general alarm which was sent in Arkansas and adjacent states by the Arkansas State Police, the parents came back to Prescott around noon today and recovered the child, who was suffering from a badly bruised and swollen face, a possible leg fracture, and other minor injuries. Several of her teeth were missing.

She was lying beside the road at the Artesian well between Prescott and Emmet when Mr. Johnson found her, after which he immediately brought her to the hospital.

Mr. Hord, who is in the army, and his wife told hospital attendants that they would admit her to a Ft. Worth hospital immediately on arrival, since she was able to travel.

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NO OCCUPATION

Published in The Prescott Daily News—1925

She rises up at break of day
And through her tasks she races;
She cooks the meals as best she may
And scrubs the children's faces,
While schoolbooks, lunches,
ribbons, too,
All need consideration,
And yet the census man insists
She has "no occupation".

She irons for a little while
Then presses pants for daddy;
She welcomes with a cheery smile
Returning lass and laddy.
A hearty dinner then she cooks,
(No time for relaxation)
And yet the census man insists
She has "no occupation".

When breakfast dishes all are done,
She bakes a pudding maybe,
She cleans the rooms up one by one,
With one eye watching baby,
The mending pile she then attacks
By way of variation,
And yet, the census man insists
She has "no occupation".

For lessons that the children learn
The evening scarce is ample,
To mother dear they always turn
For help with each example.
In grammar and geography
She finds no relaxation,
And yet the census man insists
She has "no occupation".

SALISBURY STEAK AND GRAVY

- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- ½ cup bread or cracker crumbs
- Dash of ground garlic
- 1 can cream of celery or cream of mushroom soup (I prefer mushroom)

Mix ground beef, onion, crumbs, and garlic together. Make into patties. Brown slightly on both sides. Place patties in baking dish. Mix soup and one can of water and pour over meat patties. Bake uncovered in 350 degree oven about 1 hour or until done.

As a rule, man is a fool
When it's hot, he wants it cool
When it's cool, he wants it hot
He's always wanting what it's not.

Nevada County Picayune--1933