

# THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Vol. 8 – No. 3

March, 2008

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**Henry Walter Ross and his wife, Martha Eleanor Warnock Ross  
(Photo taken on their wedding day April 3, 1845)**

The city of Rosston in Nevada County, Arkansas is named in honor of Henry Ross who donated land to be used as the county seat of Nevada County.

Nevada County was formed in 1871 and a temporary county seat had been located at Mt. Moriah, a few miles north of Rosston while a search was made for a permanent county seat that would be centrally located. The commissioners chose a site near the center of the county on property donated by Henry Ross and his wife. In September, 1871, Henry and Martha Ross “for and in consideration of five dollars” executed a deed conveying the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 21, Township 13 South, Range 21 West to Nevada County “for the purpose of locating the county seat

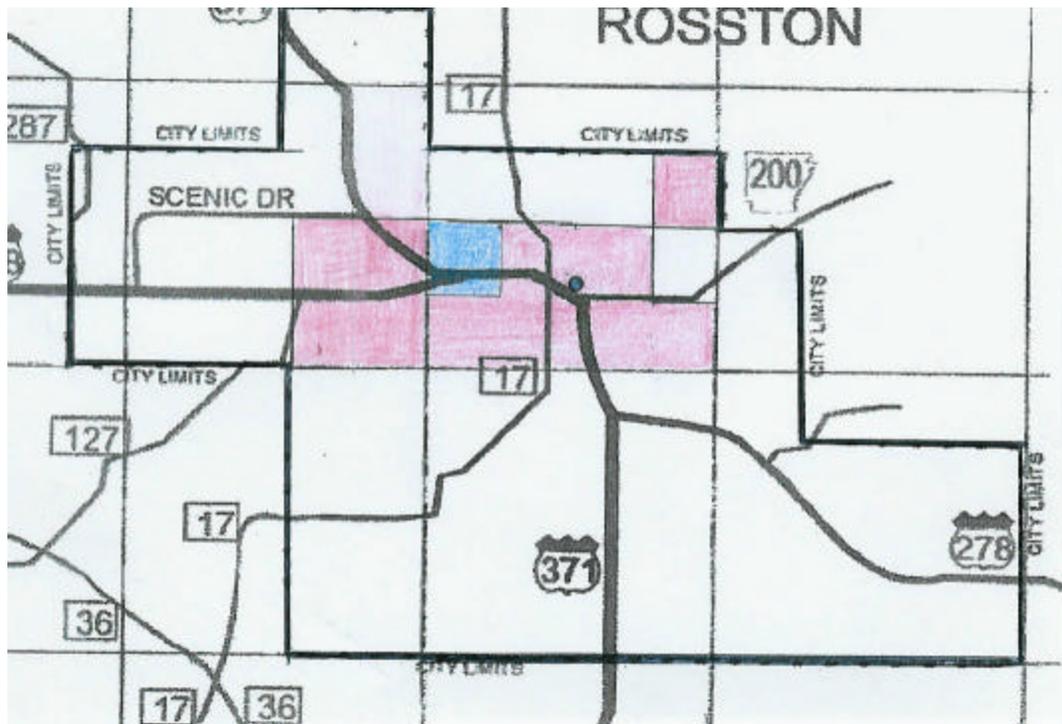
## THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

thereon". This 40 acres of land was located about where Hwys. 371 and 278 intersect on a modern Nevada County map.

Two or three years later, the railroad was built through the northern part of Nevada County and the town of Prescott was laid out. Railroad towns tended to grow rapidly in those days and soon a movement was started to move the county seat from Rosston to Prescott which had quickly become the largest town in the county. After three elections, Prescott finally won out and the county seat was moved from Rosston to Prescott in 1877.

Had Rosston remained the county seat, it would have been a much larger city today. The town had even been laid out (on paper at least) and street names had been assigned. Streets running north and south were named after presidents—Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Jackson, Van Buren, Harrison, and Tyler. Streets running east and west were named after species of trees—Pine, Olive, Beech, Spruce, Vine, and Oak. Plats showing the town layout are on file at the court house in Prescott. Since Henry Ross owned more land surrounding the 40 acres he donated, he was in a position to become quite wealthy as the town grew.

Two months after Henry donated the 40 acres of land, we find another deed in which Henry Ross and his partner, James Torrans, donated Block No. 28 of the town of Rosston to the county of Nevada. This was a city block near the center of town, so it is likely that this was the actual location of the court house and other county offices in Rosston. The 40 acre tract of land originally donated was later called "the Ross Addition" to the town of Rosston (see map).



## THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

The dark lines on the map are the present day city limits of Rosston. The blue square is the 40 acres donated by Henry Ross to Nevada County in 1871 "for the purpose of building a county seat thereon". The small blue circle near the center is Block No. 28 donated by Henry Ross and James Torrans to Nevada County. This was probably the actual location of the county offices. The area shown in red is other land owned by Henry Ross (he had an undivided half interest in part of the red area near the main part of town).

What do we know about this man, Henry Ross and his family? Barbara Masterson, his great-great granddaughter and her husband, Peter have done research on Henry Ross and other members of the Ross family and shared this information with me.

Henry was born August 27, 1822, the sixth of twelve children born to John Wiley and Prudence Winfrey Ross. When Henry was in his mid-teens, his family moved to Union Co., Arkansas from Adair Co., Kentucky. In 1845, he married Martha Eleanor Warnock, not yet age 16. Henry and Martha brought nine children into the world, but two of them, James Wiley and Mary Emeline, died while very young.

Henry served as sheriff of Ouachita County from 1858 to July, 1865 and had business interests there. During this time, he enlisted for one year as a Confederate soldier. One of his deputies probably acted as sheriff in Henry's absence. His unit was among those which surrendered at the siege of Vicksburg in 1863.

Over the years, Henry had acquired some property in Ouachita County, some of which was later sold to his brother, Israel and to Martha's brothers. This property was a few miles southwest of Camden off Old Wire Rd. Many of the deed records of Ouachita County were lost in the court house fire in 1875, so the record of all of Henry's property transactions is incomplete. We do know that he had acquired 240 acres around the present town of Rosston from T. W. Abbott and Mary Abbott in 1869. That area was still a part of Ouachita County at that time.

When the new county of Nevada chose Rosston to be the county seat, a temporary court house, clerk's office, sheriff's office and jail were constructed at Rosston on the land Henry had donated. After the election in 1877, which approved Prescott to be the county seat, the county decided to sell the county property located at Rosston. The sheriff's office was sold for \$13 and the clerk's office for \$33.50. The county jail sold for \$50. A writing desk sold for \$2.50. The court house brought \$35 and the 40 acres of land Henry had donated brought \$80.25. The total amount for the county property at Rosston was \$214.25 (these figures from an article on early Nevada County history written by R. P. Hamby).

During the short time the county government was located at Rosston, one legal hanging was carried out there. A black man was hanged for killing his wife. There were 3,000 people who witnessed the hanging. Chances are this took place in Block No. 28 which was owned by the county (the small circle on the map).

## THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Henry Ross lived less than two years after donating the land for the county seat. On July 26, 1873, Henry was shot and killed. He was 50 years old. The *Arkansas Daily Gazette* in a reprint from *The Washington Telegraph* had this report of the incident:

*"On Saturday evening last (July 26, 1873) a difficulty occurred between Dr. William Mixon and young Samuel Ross in which two men were killed. It appears, from the statement of our informant, that when Dr. Mixon and Ross were about to become engaged, Col. H[enry] Ross, father of young Ross came upon the scene and attempted to draw his pistol, which became entangled with his clothing. Upon this Dr. Mixon fired upon Col. Ross the ball entering the left breast, the wound proving fatal in about 6 hours afterwards. Several shots were fired in quick succession, one of which struck a young man Franklin Nance in the left ear entering his head and from which wound he has no doubt died. Dr. Mixon narrowly escaped as one shot passed through his under clothes and grazed the flesh. Col. Ross was much respected by his acquaintances and his death is seriously lamented. Young Nance had nothing to do with the difficulty and his wounding was purely accidental. This was truly a most unfortunate affair and very much regretted."*

Henry Ross was a private in the Civil War, so the title of "Col." in the newspaper article was probably a term of endearment.

One source states that the above incident happened "on the streets of Rosston" and that Henry was shot "by a man named Fincher". There may have been some confusion of the facts of the case when it was reported to the newspaper. The complete story may never be known.

The burial place of Henry Ross has not been found. Family members think he may have been buried on his father's farm located six or seven miles southwest of Camden off Old Wire Rd.

Henry Ross was survived by his wife, Martha and seven children (*two of their children, James Wiley and Mary Emeline, had died young*). The oldest surviving son, John Robert Ross had already married and was on his own at the time of his father's death.

Their oldest surviving daughter, Louisa Jane Ross, age 21 when Henry died, had married William L. Webb who became the first mayor of Prescott.

The other surviving daughter, Alice Angeline Ross, was married about 17 months after Henry's death to Clarence McGill, a well-known early photographer in Prescott.

The other Ross children were named Samuel, Andrew Thomas, Leslie Price, and Walter Lee. These were all under 16 years of age when Henry Ross was killed.

## THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Little is known about what happened to Henry's wife, Martha, after Henry's sudden death. She was only 44 years old when Henry was shot and had several young children to raise. In the 1880 census, she is living with her daughter, Louisa and W. L. Webb in Prescott. By 1890, most of the family had moved from the Prescott area to the state of Oklahoma. Three of Henry's sons became productive citizens of Oklahoma in various occupations. We do not have any information on what happened to one son, Samuel Ross, nor do we know the death date or burial place of Martha Eleanor Ross, Henry's wife.

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During the 1870's Rosston was home to a number of prominent lawyers and politicians and was quite a lively place. A future governor of Arkansas, Thomas C. McRae, was married at Rosston in 1874. He said that a Presbyterian minister rode from Camden to Rosston on a mule to perform the wedding because at that time, Rosston had no church, but did have four saloons.

A newspaper article printed in 1906 mentions that "probably no place in Nevada County outside Prescott is better known than Rosston". It developed like other surrounding towns. There were a few stores with the majority of the citizens being engaged in farming. It had a post office with mail routes branching out in all directions to smaller villages. In 1906, Rosston was still trying to secure a railroad to help the town grow. The 1906 article mentions stores operated by W. H. Hendrix and Bob Fairchild and a small stock of drugs and stationery in the post office building owned by Dr. T. J. Mendenhall.

This article mentions several of the prominent families living at Rosston at that time—Z. W. Bailey, Tom Whitehead, W. H. Hendrix, T. J. Mendenhall, the Fairchilds, the Haynies, the O'Keefes, the Worthams, the Lucks, the Holloways, the Dixons, the Almands, and the Easts.

At that time, Rosston had a large woodsmen camp "with a splendid hall". It also had a Masonic lodge, one of the oldest in the county. It had a good school "six to eight months of the year". A new post office and store building was in the works to be built by Dr. T. J. Mendenhall.

Today, Rosston is the third largest city in Nevada County behind Prescott and Emmet. The last census showed a population of 265 people. There are two stores operating at this time and a modern school is located on Hwy. 278 West. The town has a city hall and elected city officials, a fire department, a post office, and a city water system. The Rosston Baptist church is located at the center of town. All of the business section of Rosston including the post office, city hall, fire department, the church, and both stores are located on property once owned by Henry Ross.

The hopes for a railroad to Rosston never materialized. The closest was the Reader Railroad which once operated a few miles east of town. A spur logging tram had been built into the Rosston area from the Cotton Belt line to the south in the late

## THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

1800's to harvest the virgin pine timber, but it was it was not the kind of railroad Rosston needed to bring industry and people into the town.

The town did not develop as planned in 1871. The streets shown on the original plat were never constructed, but it is interesting to see the proposed plans for the city of Rosston.

The descendants of Henry Ross are so proud that Henry and Martha Ross were willing to donate some of their land to the county back in 1871. It shows that they were the type people who cared about their community. The newspaper account of his death mentions that Henry Ross was "much respected by his acquaintances". I'm sure Henry's untimely death in 1873 was a shock to his family and to the community of Rosston, the town that bears his name.

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### **CAMDEN PLANS TO LET WOMEN RUN THE TOWN (From the March 7, 1940 issue of The Camden News)**

The Chamber of Commerce is considering a "Ladies' Day" in Camden as a way of stimulating retail trade. The idea has been used in a town in Mississippi with much success.

The idea is to entice women in Camden and surrounding towns to come to Camden on a particular day and shop. A headquarters will be established for the visiting women. Girl scouts and other girls will direct traffic for the day inside the city. A given number of local women will act as hostesses in the shopping district. Each merchant will offer special bargains and prizes. All visiting women will register for the prizes in each store they visit which will encourage them to visit all participating stores.

To create further interest, the women of the city will take charge of the city government for the day. The woman mayor and other women officials will announce their platform in the newspapers in advance.

The woman who is to act as mayor will doubtless be requested in advance to announce that "the waters of executive clemency will flow freely to all who misbehave" – provided they don't act too badly.

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### ***I WAS JUST THINKING ABOUT.... by Jerry McKelvy***

#### **THE TRAIN RIDE**

It was about forty years ago. I was single and teaching school in a small town in southeast Missouri. I came home every chance I got in those days, sometimes driving the eight hour trip and sometimes taking the train. The railroad passed through Bismarck, Missouri which was only a few miles from where I was teaching.

## THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Traveling by train was much less stressful than driving and the train schedule fit in well with my job.

I always rode the regular passenger trains, but at that time there was a faster train called the Texas Eagle. It only stopped at the larger towns and was given priority on the track whereas the regular passenger trains sometimes had to stop for fifteen minutes or more on a siding when meeting a freight train.

It was announced that a change was being made to the schedule. The Texas Eagle would be replacing the regular passenger trains and Bismark would still be a scheduled stop which was convenient for me. I decided to give this Texas Eagle a try. I purchased my ticket from Bismarck, Missouri to Gurdon, Arkansas as usual, boarded the train, and admired the more luxurious surroundings on this upscale train. It even had Pullman cars or sleeping cars for those traveling long distances and had a dining car if you could afford the high prices for food.

We got into Union Station at Little Rock about 8 p. m. where we stopped for about twenty minutes. Many passengers got off there and new passengers boarded. I remained on the train since my ticket was for Gurdon, about 80 miles south of Little Rock. A new conductor also boarded at Little Rock.

We were soon underway again headed toward Texas and the conductor made his way down the aisle checking tickets. When he looked at my ticket, I could tell that something was wrong. He said, "Gurdon! This train hasn't stopped at Gurdon in fifteen years."

He explained that the Missouri ticket agent should not have sold me a ticket to Gurdon since that was not a stop for the Texas Eagle. That presented a problem. My folks were expecting to meet me at Gurdon and now I was being told the train did not stop there. The next stop was Texarkana.

A few minutes later, the conductor approached me and said they were making an exception to their schedule and would let me off at Gurdon since it was their fault I was sold a ticket to Gurdon. I immediately felt a sense of relief.

I soon found out that this unscheduled stop was going to be very brief. When the train passed Arkadelphia, the conductor told me to get my luggage and come to a seat near the door. He explained that they were going to make this special stop to let me off, but I must be ready to step off the train as soon as the train was stopped. So, for the last 10 minutes of my trip, I was standing with the conductor at the door with my suitcase in hand. I knew the answer before I asked, but I asked the conductor if they would stop on Sunday afternoon at Gurdon and pick me up for the return trip to Missouri. He immediately let me know that I must make other arrangements for the return trip.

That special stop in Gurdon was probably the shortest one ever made at that

## THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

depot. I began to think I might have to jump off the train, but they did come to a complete stop and put out the little portable step for me to exit the train. As soon as my feet hit the ground, the whistle blew, and the train was on its way again.

The return trip on Sunday was quite an experience. I had to ride a Continental Trailways bus from Gurdon to Little Rock, get a taxi to take me to the train depot, and sit for several hours waiting for the northbound Texas Eagle. This was the first time I had ever ridden in a taxi, so that was another new experience for me. I felt better when I got to the train depot, but found I was the only person there except for a few workers since it would be hours before the train arrived. Those hours went by very slowly. I had to be sure and stay awake because I didn't want to miss the train. Finally I got settled in on the train sometime around 11 p.m. I was afraid I might go to sleep and miss my stop in Bismarck and end up in St. Louis, so I forced myself to stay awake and tried to keep up with each little town we passed. I got back to Bismarck in the wee hours of the morning with just a few hours until time to report to school for work.

That was one weekend I wished I had taken my car instead of the train. I think that may have been my last train ride.

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### SCALLOPED POTATOES

2 pounds potatoes (about 6 medium)  
¼ cup finely chopped onion  
3 tablespoons flour  
1 teaspoon salt  
¼ teaspoon pepper  
¼ cup butter or margarine  
2 ½ cups milk

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Wash potatoes; pare thinly, and remove eyes. Cut potatoes into thin slices to measure about 4 cups.

In a greased 2-quart casserole, arrange potatoes in 4 layers, sprinkling each of the first 3 layers with 1 tablespoon onion, 1 tablespoon flour, ¼ teaspoon salt, dash of pepper, and dotting each with 1 tablespoon butter. Sprinkle top with remaining onion, salt, pepper, and dot with remaining butter.

Heat milk just to scalding; pour over potatoes. Cover and bake 30 minutes. Uncover and bake 60 to 70 minutes longer or until potatoes are tender. Let stand 5 to 10 minutes before serving. Makes 4 to 6 servings.