

# THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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## THE SAW MILL AT CANEY CREEK

Most of us older heads remember the large saw mill located at Caney Creek on what is now Hwy. 299 between Bluff City and Morris. It had various official names over the years, but we usually just called it the Caney Creek mill. The saw mill was located south of the present highway, but the previous gravel road went through the mill yard. The main road through this area (now Hwy. 299) was known as the Clark Road about 100 years ago.

I'm not sure exactly when the first saw mill operated at this location, but an early railroad known as the Sayre Lumber Co. railroad is shown on a 1901 map running from Sayre in northwest Ouachita County into Nevada County and ending at this location. This old railroad bed is still visible in places.

On early maps the mill location is labeled Dill's Mill although there is some question as to whether Dill's Mill was in exactly the same spot as the Caney Creek mill I remember. On some maps it is shown a mile further south.

Dill's Mill was named after James William Dill who was from Texas. There are references in old newspapers of Mr. Dill opening a spoke mill there in 1918. These were wooden spokes used in the manufacture of wheels. The paper stated that he had an order from the U. S. Government, but was having trouble finding enough men to work. This was about the time of World War I, so the spokes were probably used in some of the military equipment used in that war which would explain why the government was placing an order with the sawmill.

Another reference in 1928 mentions Mr. Dill opening a hardwood mill at the former location of his spoke mill. By this time, the Reader Railroad (the Possum Trot Line) had been built from Reader to the oil fields at Waterloo. The railroad line passed by Dill's Mill and provided a way to transport the lumber and railroad ties from the mill to other places.

Mr. Dill died in 1935 at age 67 and is buried in Woodville, Texas. Various lumber companies owned the mill site following his death. A map dated 1948 shows the mill site owned by Mansfield Hardware Lumber Co.

I recently received some additional information about the mill from Mrs. Margaret Munn. She sent me several old pictures taken at the mill at the time she operated a store there. She opened the store in 1941 and closed it in 1954 or 1955 after the mill had cut out of timber. The mill was owned by Ed Held of St. Louis at that time and her father owned a percentage of the mill at one time. When he sold, he reserved merchandising rights, and that was the reason for Mrs. Munn being there. Her father had a store at Cale at that time. Mrs. Munn states, "I certainly had not planned to run a store, but my father had other plans."

Mrs. Munn says the train came through four or five days a week and the men from the train would stop and come in the store for Cokes and snacks. She says she sold mostly on credit to

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anyone who wanted to buy. She carried a general line of groceries, a few clothes, and sold lots of feed and gas. Her store was open six days a week from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. She mentions that she married while she was operating the store, but her husband went into military service and was gone for 38 months. Mrs. Munn says the mill was known as Caney Creek Lumber Co. at the time she operated the store and that several families lived at the mill site.

The mill generated its own electrical power in the days before electricity reached that part of Nevada County in 1947. Mrs. Munn says that when the mill shut down for the day, the electricity in her store would go off and she would have to light lamps to use until closing time.

I'm not sure what his title was, but my uncle, Lee Roy McKelvy, worked at the saw mill for a time before he moved to the Redland community in the early 1950s and started a saw mill there. In 1954, several of the former employees of the Caney Creek Lumber Co. met at Lee Roy McKelvy's home for a chicken barbecue and to talk over old times. After the barbecue, Imon Wilson showed a film he had taken several years before of the mill in action. Those present at this reunion were: Edd Held of St. Louis, owner of the mill; Charley Green of Camden; Imon Wilson of Smackover; Theron Bevill, Albert Rhodes and Buddy Gist of Cale; Leonard Hart, Rufus Formby and Leroy Martin of Prescott; and Peck Nichols and Joe Meador of Bluff City (*from an article in the Nevada County Picayune*).

My family had some timberland near the mill and I can remember my father hauling a few logs to the mill. When a tree was struck by lightning on our place, he would cut that tree and enough other trees to make a load, cut them into short logs, and haul them to the mill. This mill employed several local men and was a pretty big industry for that part of Nevada County for many years.

The saw mill continued to operate until about 1973. Just before it closed, Charley Green of Camden managed the mill with the help of Gerald Johnson who lived at the mill site. About the time the mill closed, the Reader Railroad went out of business and the railroad tracks were taken up. It was the end of the road for the Caney Creek Lumber Co. saw mill.

I was working in the area in September, 1996 and stopped at the old mill site to eat my lunch. Here are some observations I jotted down that day.

*"I ate lunch at the old mill site today. It's a nice, cool fall day. I can almost hear the sounds of the saw mill and can almost smell the sawdust. A person who happened by here today would probably never suspect that a saw mill ever existed here. The place has really grown up. An old well is about forty feet north of the old road near a large gum tree. The Gerald Johnson house south of the road is gone now, but two large oak trees still stand. A gully along the old railroad bed is full of trash, mostly household stuff. North of the road are some old concrete pads and a few pieces of metal are scattered about. The old mill yard is growing up in pine trees. Things have really changed in twenty years or so."*

Here are some of the photos Mrs. Munn sent of Caney Creek Mill that were taken when she operated the store there about sixty years ago. If anyone has other information or photos of the old saw mill, let me know.

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**Photo taken at the mill**

**Can you identify these men? The man on the right is Gerald Johnson.**



**Clifton White—Notice the old cars and trucks parked at the mill.**



**Albert Rhodes—He cut a finger off with a saw and was showing someone how it happened and cut another finger off.**



**Mill Kids**



**The commissary store at Caney Creek Mill**

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## CANEY CEMETERY BOOK AVAILABLE

Caney Cemetery – Nevada Co., Arkansas---There are 563 identified graves at this cemetery and several unidentified graves. I have a file containing all 563 names and condensed obituary information for about 300 of those people. The complete record is 54 pages and is updated as new burials occur or new information is found. I would be happy to send you the information I have on any one surname free of charge. If you want the whole record, I can send it to you on a CD for \$6.50 which includes postage. My email address is on the top of page 1 of this issue.

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### CAN YOU HELP?

My name is Sandra Holmes. My brother William has been trying for years to find out about our Grandfather Willard Holmes. About a year ago I took over this challenge. We do not know much. Willard was born, we believe, May 7, 1896 in Nevada County Arkansas. We have heard many different towns including Bodcaw and Cale.

We find him on the 1910 census with Joseph Kelso Waddle and family. Joseph was already 65 years old at this time and Grandpa was but 14. In 1919 Willard married Mary Eskridge Gammage in Prescott, I believe. Grandma said in a letter written to my brother in 1968 that Willard had a brother who died in an accident and that his mother had died and that his father had left him with a family but she didn't know who that family was. She was quite irritated with my brother for asking. Through research I have found that there was another orphaned boy by the name of Willie Holmes who was killed in a farming accident on the farm of Lige Matthews. Lige's real name was Elijah, I believe. Willie was killed in 1912 and was 16 which means he was also born in 1896. Willie and Willard must have been twins.

Throughout my family there seems to be some mystery about my grandpa. It turns out that many of the Waddle family moved to the Coolidge, Arizona area along with my family of Gammage's and Holmes' in about 1925. We had a cousin named Rhetta Hitt that married Albert Howard Lambert and another cousin named Willis Honea who married Rhetta Lambert. Both Lamberts were Joseph's niece and nephew. My great grandparents Edward and Martha (Mattie) Hannah Gammage are buried one row over from the Waddle's in the Coolidge Cemetery.

The story has too many twists and turns to mention here but I am willing to bet that Grandpa may have been a relative of the Waddles. I do not come to this conclusion lightly. To any relatives of the Waddles reading this I want to say thank you.

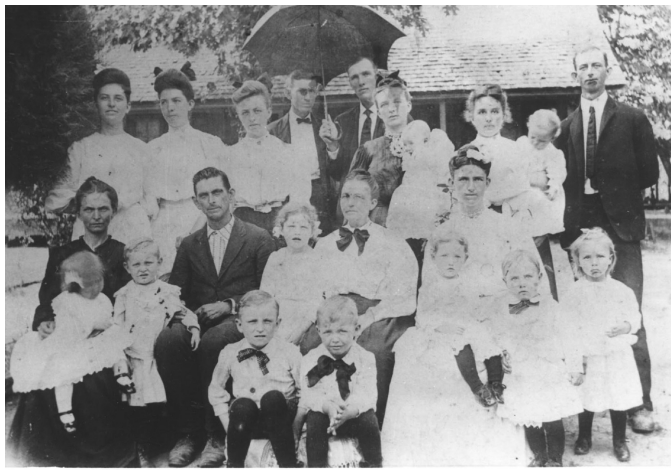
Grandpa died February 17, 1954 in Casa Grande, Arizona. Great Grandpa Gammage had a cattle ranch there and William Gordon Waddle's death certificate has his address listed as Great Grandpa's ranch. I do not see how Grandma could have forgotten (as her mind seemed fine to me before she died in 1971) that they had all moved together to Arizona. From speaking with a Waddle relative I have found out that Joseph Kelso Waddle, aka "Uncle Joe", moved to Arizona for a few years before he died. He was in his early 80's then.

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I am enclosing a photograph sent to me by Cathy Cox Straley of some of her relatives--the Jack Bolls Family. The Reverend George Edgar Waddle was there to perform the ceremony in 1907. He is on our right under the umbrella. His sister Carrie Waddle Galloway moved to Arizona with my family. The strange thing about this photo is that I showed it to everyone in my family without telling them why and EVERY person thought that the guy to his left looks like a couple of different men in our family. He looks a lot like my son, Justin but he also looks like my uncle Edward Roy Holmes and my brother William. He could be my Great Grandfather.

Can anyone identify him or provide any information about this? You can contact me at [sandyhogan@cox.net](mailto:sandyhogan@cox.net). Please help us uncover our family. Out of our four grandparents we only recently discovered the Gammage side, or should I say the extent of it. I feel like an orphan myself. We know nothing about the other three grandparents. Some of our family names include Hitt, Hannah, Honea, Greer, Ridling and of course Gammage and Holmes.

My grandfather worked at Smithton Handle Works at Smithton in Clark Co. in 1924. My brother remembers that he was injured in an explosion. We think it could have been there. I am including a picture.



**The Jack Bolls family. (see story above)**



**Sandy's grandpa in wheelchair**

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## MORE WASH POT MEMORIES (from Betty Thomas)

The old wash pot at our house was a huge thing about 28 or 30-inches in diameter and Mother heated water in it for the wash tubs as well as for "boiling" the really dirty clothes. If I remember correctly there were two and sometimes three rinse tubs. During the summer after the clothes were washed, I gave my dogs a bath in the rinse tubs--a lot of good it did for they would jump out of the tubs and head for a sand bed to roll and coat themselves in sand and then shake it off all over me.

There was an order to the way you washed the clothes: the lingerie was washed first, followed by the "white" clothes--the sheets, towels, (in those days you could get sheets in any color you wanted as long as it was white! and a lot of towels were white, too), then the "good" clothes (the ones you wore to town and church), and then last, the dirty work clothes (after they

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had done a turn in the wash pot). If Mother thought the "white" things weren't white enough, they went into the wash pot first. After the last rinse came the starch. Mother would usually make it in a dish pan and would dip the things that she wanted to have "body" into the starch and then hang them to dry. If you didn't get the starch right, the things could stand alone when they got dry they would be so stiff.

Mother only made lye soap one time and it was in the wash pot. The batch was potent stuff and would take out most dirt and the hide right off your hands! It was put in the shed where she stored the canned goods and took years for her to use it up.

I don't know if it was common practice but Mother and Daddy rendered lard in the wash pot. It would be scrubbed out clean and the cut up fat from the hogs that they butchered would be put into it and cooked very slowly over a hickory fire until the "cracklings" would come to the top of the pot where they could be skimmed off and saved to be added to cornbread batter for "crackling bread" (good stuff!). Daddy would cut a fresh hickory stick about two inches in diameter to stir the fat to keep the temperature even all through the cooking process. When I got off the school bus the "hog killing" would have gotten to the point where the lard was being rendered and the meat for sausage would be ready to be ground up. The hams and shoulders would be hanging in the smoke house and I would have missed the bloody brutal part completely--my parents had learned long before that I couldn't feed the animals without petting them and then would be broken-hearted when they became food.

Daddy and I had a little secret that we thought we kept from Mother about the lard. I would go get the biggest, roundest sweet potato that I could find and Daddy would peel it and slip it into the bubbling fat. When it came to the top, he would get it out and we would feast on deep-fried sweet potato. We thought it was the best eating ever and I'm sure part of the taste was due to it being "forbidden fruit". Mother thought it would change the flavor of the lard and discolor it. During World War II the meat and lard sure stretched the ration coupons.

The ironing was usually done the next day after the washing. The night before Mother would sprinkle all the starched things, roll them up, and put them in an old pillow case or something like that so that the moisture would evenly dampen the articles to be ironed. The old irons were heated by setting them on the wood-burning cook stove top (a hot job in summer!) or by putting them by the fireplace with the soles of the irons turned toward the fire. Some folks could test the iron by moistening the tip of a finger and touching it to the iron--I just got a blister on the finger.

Needless to say, the day the REA line got turned on and brought electricity to our house was a red-letter day. It was in 1947. With electricity came a wringer washer and an electric iron along with a pump in the well and indoor plumbing.