

Jerry McKeiv's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Vol. 10 – No. 11

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November, 2010

“DIAMOND JOHN” HUDDLESTON

We in southwest Arkansas are blessed to have the only known diamond mine in North America. It is now a state park where visitors can search for and keep any diamonds they find.

It all started back in 1906 when John Wesley Huddleston, a local farmer who had an interest in minerals, purchased 243 acres of land for \$100 near Murfreesboro in Pike County, Arkansas. This land was not very suitable for farming and contained some unusual rock formations. Mr. Huddleston, a man with very little education, had an interest in minerals and prospecting. One day he was walking over his land and noticed a couple of shiny crystals which he picked up and later showed to a local jeweler. They were sent to a jeweler in Little Rock for further analysis and were found to be gem quality diamonds. When the word leaked out, a rush of people flocked to the small Arkansas town and land values sky-rocketed. Mr. Huddleston got \$36,000 for his property only a month after his discovery. He could have probably gotten more money, but that was all he asked for the property. One story says he asked for the money to be paid in ten dollar bills.

Several attempts were made for commercial mining at the site, but for one reason or another, these operations had ceased by about 1952. The area was operated as a tourist attraction starting about 1952. The area became a state park in 1972 and it attracts thousands of visitors each year. Some very valuable diamonds have been discovered over the years. According to park records, 23,809 diamonds were found at the park from 1972 to 2001. The largest diamond found was the "Uncle Sam" found in 1924 which weighed 40.23 carats. The largest found since the park opened was the "Amarillo Starlight" in 1975 which weighed 16.37 carats. Park officials say on average about two diamonds per day are found and the average size is about the size of a match head. A one-carat diamond would be about the size of a green pea.

It is interesting to see the different methods people use in their search for diamonds. Some people visit the park on a regular basis and have learned the best way to find diamonds. Other visitors are just tourists who want to try their luck, hoping to get rich. Actually, some of the largest diamonds have been discovered by people just walking around who see something that catches their eye the same way Mr. Huddleston did back in 1906. Visitors can bring their own tools or rent or purchase tools at the park. Some say it's best to search the area after a heavy rain. The field is plowed regularly to turn over new dirt. The field where visitors are allowed to search is almost forty acres in size.

Have you ever wondered what happened to John Wesley Huddleston, the man who first discovered diamonds in Pike County? There are many stories about this man—some true and some that may have been embellished over the years. I recently found an article on the Internet entitled [John Huddleston \(1862-1941\): The Man Behind the Myth of “Diamond John”](http://www.pcahs.org/JohnHuddleston/fr1.htm) by Dean Banks (<http://www.pcahs.org/JohnHuddleston/fr1.htm>). It is evident from this article that Mr. Banks has done extensive research into the life of John Wesley Huddleston.

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John Huddleston's grandfather had settled in the Pike County area about the time Arkansas became a state. The Huddleston family was very large. It is said the grandfather had at least twenty-one offspring. There is some question about the correct birth date of John Wesley Huddleston. Most evidence suggests that he was born in 1862 even though his grave marker has his birth year as 1860. His death date on his grave marker is 1936, but he actually died in 1941.

Mr. Huddleston married in 1887 to Sarah Keyes, an older woman who had two children. They soon purchased a small farm near the present diamond mine. Mr. Huddleston was especially interested in a 243 acre tract of land, the site of the present diamond mine. He had noticed some unusual mineral deposits in that area and thought the land might contain lead, iron, or maybe even gold. He was always interested in prospecting and had a keen eye for unusual rock formations. He was able to purchase the land in 1905 for \$100 and found the first diamonds in 1906.

Mr. Huddleston sold his interest in the diamond-bearing land only a month after discovering the diamonds. He received \$36,000 which is not bad considering he only paid \$100 for the land a year earlier. It seems that Mr. Huddleston invested his money in real estate in and around the city of Murfreesboro and in Arkadelphia. He made money on some of these investments, but lost money on others. He was also involved in several law suits over the years. There are many public records on file to prove these real estate deals and court cases, all of which are documented in the article I mentioned above.

The discovery of diamonds caused a boom for the city of Murfreesboro as people flocked to the city hoping to get rich. A new city called Kimberly existed for a short time near the diamond mine.

Mr. Huddleston and his family moved to Arkadelphia in 1908 where he lived for about ten years. He still had property in Murfreesboro, so he traveled back and forth between the two cities often. He was considered a fairly wealthy man at that time compared to the average person in that area and seemed happy to be called "Diamond John".

Sarah died in 1917 and Mr. Huddleston moved back to Murfreesboro. In 1921, he remarried to a woman named Lizzie Curtis, who some say was a "carnival girl" he met in Arkadelphia. She was much younger than John. After eleven days of marriage, she left him and was gone for eleven months. She returned and stayed another eight months before leaving him again for good. It was determined that she had committed adultery during the time of their marriage and a judge ruled that the marriage be annulled. This second marriage was one of Mr. Huddleston's greatest mistakes. Evidently, Lizzie liked to spend money and by the time the marriage was annulled, Mr. Huddleston's assets had dwindled considerably.

The Great Depression of the 1930s caused hard times for almost everyone. Mr. Huddleston continued to dabble in real estate around Murfreesboro, did some farming, and opened a junkyard where he bought and sold items. The man who had discovered the only diamonds in North America ended up as a farmer and part-time junkyard dealer and died almost a pauper. When he died November 11, 1941, his family buried him at a little cemetery called Japany Cemetery which is only two or three miles from the diamond mine. The only marker at his grave

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for many years was a river rock, In 1995, some of his relatives and other local citizens unveiled a more suitable marker for his grave which represents the love John Wesley Huddleston had for the land and for prospecting. It is said that the local historical society will try to get the dates corrected on his headstone. The Crater of Diamonds State Park celebrates John Huddleston Day in June of each year.

Much more detailed information on this man can be found at the web site I mentioned above, including several pictures of the Huddleston family.



GRAVE OF "DIAMOND JOHN" HUDDLESTON

SANITARY REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOL IN 1913 (NEVADA COUNTY)

It shall be the duty of school teachers to flood the school room with fresh air by opening windows and doors at recess and at noontime and at least once during each session of school and at other times whenever the air becomes close or foul. During cold weather the pupils shall be given calisthenics exercises during the times the windows are open.

Dry sweeping and dusting is condemned and prohibited. Dampened or oiled sawdust should be used when sweeping. Feather dusters shall not be used.

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JACK GULLEY—FIRST TO BE SENTENCED TO ELECTRIC CHAIR FROM NEVADA COUNTY

THE CRIME

Arval Cox, a 21 year-old merchant from Falcon, was driving his peddling truck making his rounds on August 22, 1940 when he was flagged down by Jack Gulley, a Negro, who pretended to want to buy something from the peddler. Gulley struck Arval Cox on the head with an iron bar and stole several dollars in cash. He then placed Mr. Cox in one of the compartments of his peddling truck and drove away, but soon wrecked the truck. He then took Mr. Cox's billfold, left him by the truck, and fled the scene. After an all night search with bloodhounds, he was arrested. A mob had already formed, so Gulley was taken to a Texarkana jail for his own safety. Mr. Cox was taken to the hospital, but was pronounced dead.

THE TRIAL

The trial was held in Prescott on September 26, 1940 with a courtroom packed with spectators. Gulley pled guilty of murdering Mr. Cox. A few witnesses were called including two who said they witnessed the wreck and Gulley taking the billfold from Mr. Cox. When Gulley was arrested he had some of the money that was stolen. The trial lasted one hour. The jury of twelve men reached a verdict in less than 10 minutes. Gulley was sentenced to die in the electric chair at sunrise on November 1, 1940. This was the first person from Nevada County to be sentenced to the electric chair since it replaced hanging as the method of execution in 1913.

A REPRIEVE GRANTED

Several members of the Cox family left Prescott at 1:00 a.m. to be present at the execution of Jack Gulley. When they arrived at the prison, they were informed that Gov. Bailey had granted a two week reprieve so the case could be investigated further.

THE EXECUTION

On November 15, 1940, Jack Gulley was executed at sunrise for the murder of Arval Cox.

The whole process from the time the crime was committed until the execution took less than three months. Compare that to today when it sometimes takes many years for the judicial process to work. Arval T. Cox is buried at Falcon Cemetery. I could find no information on what happened to the body of Jack Gulley.

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THREE MILES TO CAMP

Imagine you are serving in the military during the Civil War. Your days are filled with long marches through the countryside always on guard for any surprise attack. Riding a horse all day or driving a wagon full of supplies is hard on the body, but if you were a foot soldier, it was especially hard. You would be required to carry several pounds of equipment on your back plus your rifle, canteen, and knapsack as you marched on dusty roads in dry weather and muddy roads in wet weather. If you were a Union soldier, you probably had better equipment than the Confederates and better shoes and clothing. About the only advantage the Confederates had was a better knowledge of the land. The marches were halted about every two hours to allow the men to rest, search for water, and allow the stragglers to catch up.

Camp sites were usually selected because there was some sort of water supply for the horses as well as the men. You might just camp overnight and resume your march the next day, or in some cases, you might be given a few days to rest.

Besides getting some much needed rest at these camps, you might have a little free time to write a letter to your family or a girlfriend back home, hoping that the letter will reach the intended recipient without a great delay. Mail service was probably not too dependable during wartime for an army on the move.

It was not all rest at these camp sites. There were chores to do like cleaning your rifle, washing your clothes, or taking a much needed bath. The main thing was probably catching up on lost sleep as best you could under the circumstances. It might be that better food was served while camped. Sometimes armies on the move got farm produce or maybe some pigs, chickens, or fruit from people who lived along the route. Sometimes this was given freely and in some cases it was just confiscated by the soldiers. Any type of fresh food was preferable to the usual rations they were served.

When camped for several days, there was time for other things. In a large group of men, there would probably be a few who played some sort of musical instrument such as a harmonica who could provide a little entertainment during these respites from war. I'm sure there were card games or maybe a game of pitching horse shoes. There were also some men who enjoyed writing. They might write about their experiences during the war, sort of like keeping a diary. Some were gifted with the ability to write good poems or stories. All they needed was something to inspire them or give them an idea.

I came across one example of this that happened in our neck of the woods in 1864 during Gen. Steele's expedition from Little Rock to Camden. A Union soldier who participated in this march later wrote of his experiences, giving a brief account of this expedition to Camden.

It is important to know that the entire army (said to be about 12,000 men) did not always move as a group. Some regiments or brigades might move ahead of the main army for a specific purpose. Some units were charged with building or repairing bridges across creeks so the main army, artillery, and supply wagons could cross. Others were skirmishing with the enemy who was constantly trying to attack the soldiers as they moved. Therefore, groups of soldiers

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camped at different places along the route. How many miles per day could they cover? That depended on many things--resistance from the enemy, the terrain, condition of the roads, etc. One general reported that his regiment had marched 20 miles that day plus having fought a battle along the way. Another mentioned having marched 24 miles one day.

Gen. Steele's route took him southwest out of Little Rock to Benton and Arkadelphia. His army later crossed the Little Missouri River at a place called Elkin's Ferry in the northern part of what is now Nevada County. A battle occurred there as the army tried to cross the river with the Union army pushing back the Rebels. The writer stated his unit rested a few days after crossing the river and then proceeded on to a place known as Prairie de Anne near what is now Prescott, arriving there in late afternoon on April 10. His brigade camped on the prairie two or three nights and had several engagements with the enemy, who had built fortifications there. The Rebels again were forced to abandon their fortifications at Prairie de Anne. There are reports of another camp in the area of Moscow on the southern edge of the prairie. This was the site of another small skirmish as the army proceeded on toward Camden, the most fortified city in southwestern Arkansas.

A few miles from Moscow, the army had to cross the Terre Rouge Creek bottom which was not easy. You can imagine thousands of men on foot, others on horses, and many loaded wagons trying to cross some of the creek bottoms in our part of the state. There were roads back then, but nothing like we have today. This was in April, a time of the year when heavy spring rains were common. One account of the crossing of the Little Missouri River a few days earlier mentioned that a heavy rain had fallen with the river rising three feet overnight. This soldier writes of the men having to wade across the Terre Rouge Creek bottom and described it as "a dismal swamp". During my working career with International Paper Co., I worked in these woods at various times and can attest that his description of this area is accurate.

The Union army proceeded on through what is now Nevada County. Brig.-Gen. Carr's report mentions camping at Dr. Rook's plantation on April 13. From looking at an old map, I believe this camping spot would be near Ebenezer, about three miles south of Bluff City. From this point the army pressed on toward Camden making another camp near White Oak creek in what is now Ouachita County.

One brigade of the Union army under the command of Gen. Rice had been ordered on April 14 to march ahead of the main army to reach a certain road junction ahead of the Rebels. To do this they had to move very fast. The men were very tired, but they pressed on to their goal. They even ate crackers as they marched, not taking time to stop to eat a regular meal.

A. V. Kendrick, the Union soldier who later wrote of his experiences during this expedition to Camden, was in this brigade. He mentioned that during this fast march, the question the men most often asked was: "How much farther is it to camp?" The men were dog-tired and badly needed time to rest. They had endured two or three battles in the last few days besides having to be on the move when not fighting.

Finally someone rode by and said it was only three more miles to camp. This was all the soldier/poet needed to come up with a poem to fit the occasion. I can just imagine this soldier

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leaning up against a tree resting and scribbling out this poem which he entitled "Three Miles to Camp". The poem was longer, but Mr. Kendrick only recorded the first few lines for us.

THREE MILES TO CAMP

"Onward marching, ever onward,
Through the forest lone and drear,
Now fatigue almost o'ercomes us,
Scarce our limbs their burdens bear;
Still the evening shadows deepen,
Yet no sign of rest appears.
But a horseman comes to greet us,
And his glad shouts greet our ears:
'Three miles to camp. Three miles to camp!'
Pass the word along the column.
Cheer the weary, cheer the solemn,
Soon now rest will come.
It's only three miles to camp."

Their rest was short-lived. Early the next morning, they were attacked by the Rebels in what the writer described as "the first battle of Poison Springs". This skirmish lasted about two hours and the brigade had to continue in battle mode all the way into Camden, a distance of about 12 miles. The Rebels had set the woods on fire hoping to destroy the ammunition wagon and to hinder the advance of this Union brigade. The brigade finally made it to Camden on April 15.

A large number of wagons with an escort were sent west out from Camden to forage for corn and other supplies. This wagon train was attacked at Poison Springs on April 18. This was the main battle which lasted for several hours with several hundred men killed. This Confederate victory deprived the Union army of much needed supplies as they occupied Camden.

The poem means more to us when we know the story behind it. This was probably the camp near White Oak Creek mentioned in the official reports and would be only a few miles from Poison Springs. The next time you travel by Upper White Oak Lake and Poison Springs, you might think of this soldier's poem and remember the historic events that happened there in April, 1864.

GENEALOGY 101

For those of you who are interested in doing some family research, I thought I would give you a few ideas. I'm no expert at it, but I've found these helpful in my research.

Caution: You can easily become addicted to genealogy research if you use these. It's like putting a jig-saw puzzle together. You are rewarded when you find a missing link or piece of the puzzle plus you learn things about your family that you didn't know. The main thing is to keep good records, write down where you got the information, and organize your materials so you can

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find something easily. You can store your information on your computer or on paper--whichever works best for you. Just remember, if you keep everything on a computer, back up your files or you could lose everything if your computer crashes. If you decide to keep everything on paper, you will soon find that you may need to add a room to your house because this stuff can really accumulate and take up space.

The information below may help you in your research, but probably the first thing you should do is talk to the older members of your family. Take notes or take a tape recorder with you. Check out the old family Bibles for family information recorded there. Try to identify people in old family photographs and label them. Start with what you know and work backwards until you hit the proverbial "brick wall" and even then don't give up. Something may turn up eventually that will get you going again. You may find you are distantly related to some famous person or you may find a few "black sheep" in your family. That's what makes it interesting.

USEFUL WEB SITES

<http://www.findagrave.com/>

This site lets you search for burial places. You can search for a person or search for a cemetery. Many graves have pictures of grave markers. Click on the little tombstone by the name to see the photos. Click on the photos to enlarge them. Remember that not every grave or cemetery will be listed on this site.

<http://www.familysearch.org/>

This site is operated by the Mormons. You can access information researched by others, but remember to verify the information for yourself since it is not always correct.

<http://www.depotmuseum.org/>

Nevada County Depot Museum site. The McKelvy Cemetery Surveys of Nevada County are located here along with much historical information and old photos concerning Nevada County

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~arnevada/>

Nevada County genweb site

Several categories of materials useful in your research. A partial index of obituaries from Nevada County papers can be found here. I have a more complete list, so contact me if you are looking for someone. You can search in other states and counties by changing the state abbreviation and county name in the link above.

<http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov.PatentSearch/>

Bureau of Land Management web site

Use this site to search for land patents. If one comes up, you can get the legal description of the land so you can know exactly where your ancestors owned land. You will need some knowledge of how to read land descriptions to do this. I can help you with that.

Heritage Quest

Good for looking at census records. Usually accessed through the libraries or by entering a code provided by a library

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<http://www.ancestry.com/>

Lot of information, most of which requires a payment. Occasionally, they offer a few days of access to some material at no charge. I have never subscribed to this, so I can't help you much on this.

<http://genforum.genealogy.com/>

Read messages and queries posted by others. Just type in your surname to read messages or post one of your own. You can also type in a county name to get messages relating to that county.

LIBRARIES

Nevada County Library

Almost new facility. Has a genealogy room with two microfilm machines, one of which can make copies. Has newspaper microfilm from *The Nevada County Picayune* from 1884 and *The Nevada News from 1906*. Some family histories, obituary collections, and school yearbooks.

Ouachita County Library

Good genealogy room. Microfilm of Camden newspapers in separate room. Family histories. Books. Local history. (Part of Nevada County was in Ouachita Co. prior to 1871)

Columbia County Library

Just moved into a larger facility. Has a genealogy room with microfilm of Columbia County papers dating back to about 1878. (part of Nevada County was in Columbia Co. prior to 1871)

Hempstead County Library

Has microfilm of Hope newspapers and other genealogy materials. (part of Nevada County was in Hempstead Co. prior to 1871)

ARCHIVES

<http://www.southwestarchives.dreamhosters.com/>

Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives Legacy Site

Menus at bottom of home page. Description of materials available. Located at Washington, AR. Large collection of family histories, books, maps, microfilm, etc. for twelve counties in southwest Arkansas. A part of the Arkansas History Commission.

Arkansas History Commission

Located in Little Rock near the capitol. See their web site for more information.

COURT HOUSE OFFICES

County Clerk

Has wills, probate records, and marriage records. Index books will help you quickly locate the records. You are on your own when looking up records. Office staff will show you where to look.

Circuit Clerk

Has deeds, court records, soldier's discharge records, divorce records. You are pretty much on your own in looking up records. Deeds can be searched by "grantor" or "grantee". When you

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find a record in the large index books, get the book and page number and then look up the actual record. It takes some time for this type research, so leave plenty of time.

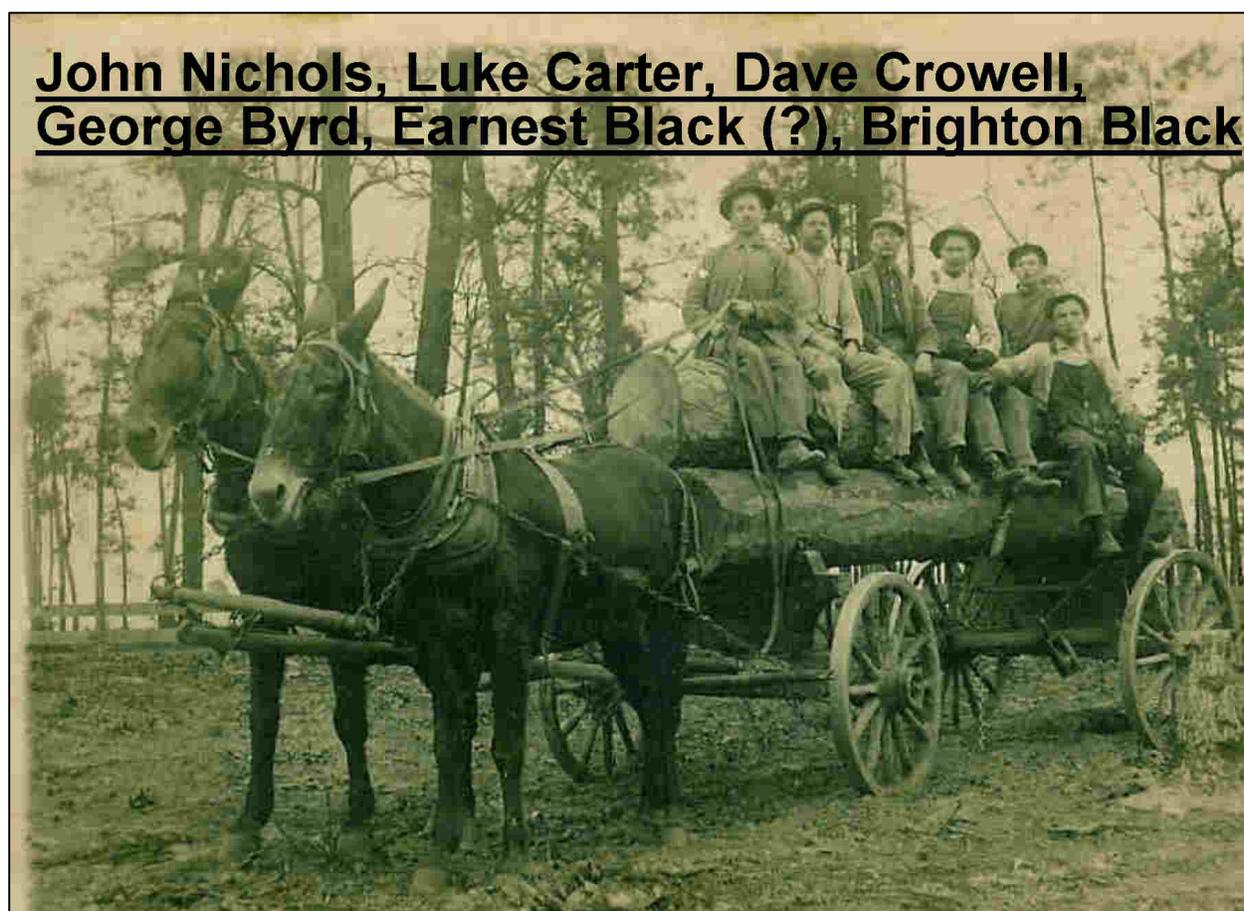
Remember that Nevada County was created in 1871, so anything before that might be in Hempstead, Ouachita, or Columbia counties (provided the court house didn't burn)

LOCAL RESEARCHERS/VOLUNTEERS

If you live far off, you may want to contact a local researcher to find records for you. They usually charge for their services and time. See the GenWeb site for list of volunteers.

You may contact me with any questions. I might be able to help or point you in the right direction. I will do look-ups on microfilm or courthouse research for a reasonable charge. My email address is at the top of page 1.

A PICTURE FROM THE PAST



Bluff City men posing with log wagon

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Nevada County Picayune—Dec., 1915 (Bluff City local news column)

A debate will be held at the school. Resolved, That the dish rag is more important than the broom.

The man getting his hair cut noticed that the barber's dog, which was lying on the floor beside the chair, had his eyes fixed on his master at work.

"Nice dog," said the customer.

"He is, sir,"

"He seems very fond of watching you cut hair."

"It ain't that, sir," explained the barber. "You see, sometimes I make a mistake and snip off a bit of a customer's ear."

NO NEWS

(from the 8-4-1910 issue of *The Prescott Daily News*)

Local news is very scarce today. Nobody has got married. Nobody died. There were no new babies, no runaways, nobody caught any fish (that we know of), nobody brought in any vegetables, and nobody has been drunk except (well, that's none of your business and we cannot tell). There were no dog fights; in fact, there has been little or nothing doing that the local man could gather news from. How would you like to be the news man?



REMEMBER TO VOTE NOVEMBER 2

"Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote."—*George Jean Nathan*

"The future of this republic is in the hands of the American voter."—*Dwight Eisenhower*