

Jerry McKeiv's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Vol. 11 – No. 12

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December, 2011

PRESCOTT, ARKANSAS (THE EARLY DAYS)

The largest town and county seat of Nevada County is Prescott. Here are a few things about Prescott that you might interest you.

How did Prescott get its name?

I have a county map that says it was named for one of the surveyors, W. H. Prescott, in 1873.

A newspaper article dated 1883 states that Prescott was laid out and named for ex-county judge, W. H. Prescott in 1873. This agrees with a list of Nevada County officials which lists W. H. Prescott as being county judge from 1875 to 1880. He possibly could have been a surveyor before serving as county judge.

An interesting coincidence—Prescott, Arizona was also named for W. H. Prescott, but not the same man. The Arizona town's namesake was William Hickling Prescott, the famous historian who lived from 1796 to 1859, his death occurring long before Prescott, Arkansas was started.

Some think that Prescott, Arkansas was also named after this William Hickling Prescott, the historian, who was a friend of some of the railroad officials. I am willing to accept the version given in the 1883 newspaper article that it was named for the ex-surveyor/county judge. The article even mentions that "our fellow citizens, Robert Burns and Judge William Frazier, had the honor of naming it, the circumstances of which were detailed in the *St. Louis Republican* of March 10th". If we could find a copy of that paper, we would know more concerning the naming of the town of Prescott.

What was the population of Prescott when it was incorporated?

Again, I go to the 1883 newspaper article. It states that in 1877, Prescott's population was "less than 400 souls". The population was estimated to be 2450 when the article was written in 1883 and "was rapidly growing". This was in spite of two destructive fires in the city in 1877 and in December, 1882.

Who was the first mayor of Prescott?

The first mayor was William L. Webb. He also served at a city alderman. There is a Webb Street in Prescott, presumably named for Mayor Webb. William L. Webb is buried in the old section of DeAnn Cemetery.

What is the population of Prescott today?

According to the 2010 census, 3296 people live in Prescott.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Did Prescott have a school in the early days?

In 1883, Prescott had a nice high school named for Tom Allen, a railroad man. The newspaper article says the school cost \$10,000 and was fully paid for. The article gave an account of “the electric bell” which signaled the call to classes, recess, and dismissal. The bell was located in the main hall and connected to a battery in the principal’s office. Besides the principal, Prof. G. A. Hayes, the teaching staff was composed of “six young ladies”.

Was there a court house in Prescott in 1883?

The article states that construction of a new \$20,000 court house was to begin in the spring of 1883. County business was conducted in a temporary court house until the new one was completed. Nevada County was formed in 1871, and the first county seat was at Mt. Moriah, and later moved to Rosston. No court house was ever constructed at Rosston, even though the town had been laid out on paper showing the street names and a block reserved for the future court house.

Who were these first settlers of Prescott?

The construction of the railroad through northern Nevada County was the main factor in the rapid growth of the town. Trains brought settlers from various places. Many came to get a fresh start or maybe to take advantage of plenty of low-cost land available for farming. The 1883 article states that “our citizenship is composed principally of southern people, although England, Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Prussia are represented”.

What did these early settlers do to make a living?

The 1883 newspaper article states “Several of our Irish and English fellow-citizens are engaged in business in town, but a majority of the foreign elements are tillers of the soil. Grape growing, vegetable gardening, and fruit culture are among the industries contiguous to Prescott”.

With all the farming in the surrounding country-side, there was a need for stores to supply all their farming needs—tools, plows, buggies, clothing, shoes, groceries, and all the other things a family might need. Being situated on the railroad, it was easy to get supplies delivered to stores in Prescott. There was a need for doctors, dentists, preachers, undertakers, blacksmiths, bankers, and others. These businesses were also represented in the early days of Prescott.

What was Prescott like in 1883?

According to the newspaper article “we have five druggists, eight physicians, two artists, three bakers, one bank, two barbers, four blacksmiths, four shoemakers, nine carpenters, one dentist, one jeweler, twenty-seven grocers, one gunsmith, five saloons, twelve general merchandise establishments, two hardware stores, two hotels, three restaurants, eight real estate agents, ten lawyers, four milliners, four undertakers and dealers in furniture, one planing mill, seven churches, a temperance council, Knights of Honor, American Legion of Honor, American Knights of Freedom and Masonic lodges, consisting of chapter and lodge with a prospect of an

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

organization of Knights Templar. Our educational facilities are complete in every particular and second to none in the state. The colored people have a large and flourishing free school in operation ten months of the year”.

The writer of the newspaper article from 1883 entitled his article “A Live Arkansas Town”.

ANDERS MONSON

One of the well-known early business men of Prescott was Anders Monson. Mr. Monson was born in Sweden in 1841. In 1860, at the age of 19, he and a friend started out for America to start a new life. During the trip, the friend died and was buried at sea. Anders landed in the United States speaking no English and all alone in an unfamiliar country at a time when the country was divided and on the verge of a civil war. Anders first settled in Ludington, Michigan. A few years later he was in Alabama where he met Mattie F. Griffith and the two fell in love. It is said the courtship was carried on through an interpreter.

Mattie's mother did not want her to marry the foreigner and soon the Griffith family moved across the Mississippi into Arkansas. Anders soon followed, settling first in the tiny village of Moscow in Nevada County. This was in 1871, the same year that Nevada County was formed. While at Moscow, he operated a tan yard, taught violin lessons, and sold books.



Love finds a way of conquering all, and in November, 1871, Anders and Mattie were married when he was 30 and she 28. Her widowed mother moved in with them although she never quite forgave Anders for marrying her daughter.

It was about this time that the railroad was being constructed through the area and Anders Monson boarded some of the railroad workers when they were constructing the railroad. The few store owners at Moscow saw that being close to the railroad would be to their advantage and soon moved their places of business closer to the railroad. Soon the town of Prescott began to take shape and more and more people came to the area on the trains to take advantage of the available land for farming. Anders Monson moved to the new town in 1873 and built the city's first two-story business on First and Elm Street. He was one of the signers of the petition to incorporate Prescott as a city.

It is said that his mother-in-law drove her buggy around collecting eggs, chickens, and pigs to sell to raise money for the First Presbyterian church, the first church organized in Prescott. She was one of the eleven charter members when the church was organized in 1874. Mattie was also a charter member, but Anders remained a Lutheran to the end.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE



Anders Monson operated his store in Prescott for many years, selling musical instruments and sewing machines. He must have been a sharp business man because he soon owned several business houses in town. He saw the new town of Prescott in its earliest days and watched it develop. He had the only music store in town and according to a newspaper article in 1900, "his honest dealings have won for him the confidence of the people and a liberal patronage".

Mr. and Mrs. Monson were blessed with five children--Bettie Crestina (born in 1872), Anna Helena (born in 1874, a daughter who died as an infant (born in 1877), Alice Modena (born in 1879), and a son, Anders Monson, Jr. (born in 1882).

In the early part of 1882 things were going well for the Monsons. His business was doing well and the town of Prescott was growing rapidly. But two years later, things changed drastically. Their two-year old son, Anders Monson, Jr. died. This was a terrible blow for the family, especially Mrs. Monson. She was grief-stricken and went every day and sat by his grave even during rainy weather. She took pneumonia from which she never recovered. She died in 1885, leaving Anders to raise the three small girls alone. Her mother died soon after.

I'm sure the next few years were difficult, but Anders persevered. He devoted the next 35 years to his business. He finally retired from business in 1921. In his later years, Anders Monson became blind and had severe arthritis in his hands which affected his violin playing. He told his family, "I'll play the violin again in the spring when my hands are better", but of course, he never did. He lived the last few years with his daughter, Bettie. He lived to the ripe old age of 95. On his 94th birthday, he sang a touching Swedish song called "The Spring Song" to his family in the Swedish language.



Near the end of his long life, the Prescott city council named a street in his honor. Monson Street intersects with West First Street just past the Sonic drive-in across the highway from Wildcat Rd.

Anders Monson died in February, 1936 at the age of 95. At that time he was Prescott's oldest resident.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Kay Reynolds Whitehead, who is a great-great granddaughter of Anders Monson, has Mr. Monson's old violin, his Swedish Bible, and many letters from his family written in the Swedish language. Thanks to Kay for sharing the family information and pictures for this article.

Wouldn't it be nice to have some type of recording of Anders Monson playing his violin? At least the family still has this beautiful violin to treasure.



Anders Monson is the story of success in America--a man who came to this country all alone in 1860, turning his love of music into a thriving business in Prescott, Arkansas, respected by the people of the town, and honored by the city council for his contributions.

READER'S COMMENTS

The question for this issue was—If you could bring back something from the old days that is not available today, what would it be. Here are some answers I received:

The one thing I think would do the most good is to have the population of...., say, the year 1260 but with the knowledge and progress we have now; kinda like the old, "If I knew what I know now back when I was 24" saying.... *Duncan McKelvey*

One of the things I miss the most about the past is Saturday night GUNSMOKE on TV with Matt Dillon, Miss Kitty, Doc, and Chester!!! My cousins, brothers, and I would all be on the floor circled around a DISHPAN full of home grown popcorn with melted cow butter swimming on the top, and a steaming hot pan of parched peanuts from the barn loft. Life can't get any better than that for a 10 year old!!! I've said it before, and I'll say it again: SO GLAD I GREW UP IN DIXIE!!!!—*Dr. Annette Lemons*

The old Palestine and thus no Israel, the root cause of lots of our current problems due to blind support of Israel and generated hate for the United States.—*David Cummins*

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

If I could bring back one thing from my childhood it would be that people would travel by train as they did prior to 1960. It would be safe and clean, comfortable and efficient.

My husband's father and grandfather were with the railroad, so he and his brother grew up traveling by train all over the U.S.A. My grandmother took me on many train trips. I was 10 the last time I rode as a child.

In 2003 while living in Florida, my husband and I drove a car to CN from Florida for an elderly couple who were our friends and neighbors. The husband was in ill health and could not drive their car back north. We took the opportunity to see the East coast along the way and visit many Civil War battlegrounds. We spent three days in Gettysburg!

The best part of the trip: on the way back to Florida, we left New Haven, CN via a commuter train to New York City's Penn Station. From there, we got a passenger train (compartment) to Tampa. You get VIP treatment when you travel by train and have a compartment.

It was wonderful to see things from the window of the train such as the Washington Monument and the U.S. Capitol all lighted up after dark. The porter came to our room and made our beds while we had dinner. The dining room had white cloth table covers and napkins. It was elegant! The food was great and we slept like babies.

It is still possible to use passenger service, but it is limited. The routes and schedules are not easily adapted for a vacation or every day travel. Therefore, I would like to see passenger train travel updated and expanded so that we can go where we want when we want.

It would break my heart to see train travel die. —*Ginger Porterfield Patterson*

The safety and freedom we had to run all over “anywhere” without a thought that we might be harmed.—*Larry Jameson*

MA FERGUSON TAKES OFFICE AS GOVERNOR OF TEXAS (from the January 22, 1925 issue of *The Nevada News*)

Her hand resting on the worn Bible used in the early days when Texas was a republic, Miriam Amanda Ferguson today took the oath of office as governor.

The administration of the oath by the chief justice of the State Supreme Court to Mrs. Ferguson took place in the hall of the House of Representatives at 12:30 o'clock this afternoon.

The solemnity of the occasion was such that it cast a spell on the 6,000 persons who thronged the hall to witness the taking over of the reins of state by a woman.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

The crowd strained to hear the voice of its new chief executive, speaking with a slight tremor and so low that it was scarcely heard beyond the first row of seats before the speaker's platform. As a seal of fidelity to the trust imposed upon her, Governor Ferguson kissed the time-worn Bible at Psalm 119:105, which reads, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path."

After taking the oath of office, Governor Ferguson was seated amid the outbursts of applause that rocked the capital. Governor Neff, in a voice shaking with emotion, introduced his successor. Turning to Mrs. Ferguson at the conclusion of his own farewell address, the retiring executive said:

"Mrs. Ferguson, I have removed everything from the office I am vacating except for three things. Hanging on the walls you will find a picture of our lamented former president, Woodrow Wilson, which I trust, will serve you as an inspiration. In a vase on your desk you will find a white flower, which will remind you of the virtues of the office to which you have been entrusted. On the table you will find a Holy Bible, which should be your guide and comforter throughout the next two years."

Note: Ma Ferguson was the first woman governor of Texas and the second woman governor in American history. The governor of Wyoming was the first. Mrs. Ferguson had previously been first lady of Texas when her husband served as governor. He was impeached during his second term and was not able to get his name on the ballot for the next election. This is when his wife decided to run and said if elected she would consult her husband on making decisions and therefore, the citizens of Texas would "have two governors for the price of one". She became known as "Ma" because she was a devout mother and also because of the first two initials of her name. During her time as governor, she and her husband were referred to as "Ma and Pa Ferguson". She served two terms as governor and ran several more times. Her administration was controversial because she supported limiting the power of the Ku Klux Klan and she also pardoned an unusual number of criminals during her time as governor—an average of 100 per month.

WIDOWER LOST HIS TEETH (from the 10-13-1911 issue of *The Nevada County Picayune*)

A widower from Missouri was engaged to be married to a lady in Hugo, and the wedding took place a few days ago. He left his Missouri home in time to arrive at Hugo a day in advance of the time that the wedding was to take place. Just before reaching his destination, while looking out of the window, his artificial teeth fell out of his mouth. Being too vain for the prospective bride to see him without teeth and fearing that it might possibly have the effect of breaking up the match, he wouldn't stop at Hugo, but came to Paris and rushed up to a dentist's office to have a new set of teeth made on short order. The dentist protested that he could not make a set in the short time required, but the widower told him that the wedding was set for the next day and that he was bound to have them. The dentist went to work and by working all the evening and all night, he

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

succeeded in making the set of teeth, and the wedding was pulled off on time. (re-printed from *The Paris News*)



Deer hunters can appreciate this. (cartoon by Zettie Link)



Over 40 years ago when I was teaching American history at a small country school in Missouri, Earl Rennie, one of my students, drew this portrait of John F. Kennedy from a picture in his text book. I've kept his work all these years.

I was looking through my files the other day and came across this poem I wrote back in 1994. It was about the dispute at that time on whether Jennings Osborne would be allowed to proceed with his extravagant Christmas light display at his home in Little Rock. Each year the display seemed to get larger until it had become quite an attraction. Jennings Osborne never did anything in a small way. When it outgrew his property, he purchased two adjoining properties next to his home to make more room for the display. About three million lights were used in his decorations and they were turned on for 35 days during the Christmas season from sunset to midnight. Some of his neighbors complained about the display saying that a trip to the grocery store took two hours due to the traffic congestion, that their lawns were being trampled, and that

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

an ambulance couldn't get to their homes in an emergency. They took Osborne to court and the judge ruled that Osborne could only display his light show for fifteen days and said the lights could only be turned on from 7 p.m. until 10:30 p.m. Osborne appealed to the state supreme court which upheld the lower court's ruling. After his loss in court, Osborne received several offers from other cities to host his light display and the lights were eventually moved to other cities and such places as Disney World and Graceland.

I never saw his light display in person, but it looked spectacular on television. Even though it was enjoyed by many people, I can understand the neighbor's concerns about the display. Jennings Osborne was also well known for the barbecue meals he served and for many other acts of kindness he showed to people he didn't know personally. Many of his good deeds were not publicized. He was blessed with riches and shared his good fortune with others. He was a man with a big heart, but his heart finally gave out on July 27, 2011. Jennings Osborne died at age 67 from complications from heart surgery, but he will long be remembered in Arkansas.

You can get an idea of what the display was like by searching for "osborne light display" on YouTube. It shows his lights being displayed at Disney World in Orlando, Florida.

Question for the next issue--What is your opinion about this case? Should there be rules regarding how big a Christmas display can be on private property? Consider both sides of the question. Could there have been a better solution?

THE FIFTEEN DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

'Twas the month before Christmas,
And all through the state,
The light display was questioned.
What would be its fate?

The lights were all hung
On the Osborne's grounds with care,
Jennings hoped that his neighbors
His Christmas spirit would share.

His neighbors were all home,
All snug in their beds,
While visions of traffic jams
Danced in their heads.

A nuisance, they claimed,
So they took Osborne to court.
The judge somewhat agreed
But tried to be a good sport.

She said, "Only fifteen nights
The lights are to shine.

The neighbors also have rights
And even I have mine."

So the lights came on
And since the display was free,
Down Cantrall Road they came
Thousands of people, the lights to see.

From out on the street
There arose such a clatter,
The neighbors rushed out
To see what was the matter.

"Osborne's at it again!"
They began to lament,
"Let's just leave town.
We'll live in a tent".

But the crowd all exclaimed,
"O, what a marvelous sight.
A merry Christmas to all
And to all a good night".

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE



Remember when people would gather on the court house lawn in Prescott on election night to watch the vote count come in? I'm not sure of the date of this photo except that it had to be before 1967. The only two people I can identify are Mr. Charlie Henry and Mr. Con Harvey from Bluff City (far left side of photo). Perhaps you can identify some of the others.

I am looking for pictures of the old Ebenezer church building and the store building at Terrapin Neck. If you have one, please contact me. I am always interested in old pictures of people, places, and events in Nevada or Ouachita counties.

Why not honor your ancestors by contributing a story about them for the *Sandyland Chronicle*. I can help you write the story if you provide the details and pictures to go with it. I'm sure there are many interesting stories about our local folks that could be written.

Thanks to all who have contributed material in the past. Your comments and suggestions are welcome.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE



This is a leaf from a sycamore tree. The tree was trimmed back last winter and I guess it is trying its best to recuperate from the trauma it suffered. Sycamore leaves are large, but this tree produced some of the largest leaves I've ever seen. This one measures 20 inches across.

Sycamore trees are fast growing and produce plenty of shade. However, they are somewhat messy. Small dead limbs and twigs fall almost every time a hard wind blows. Pieces of bark also fall from the trunk of the trees. These trees can get over 100 feet tall, so think twice before planting one of them for a shade tree. Also consider the job of raking all these huge leaves each year.

I think someone (maybe Sydney Sycamore) must have come through the country years ago selling or giving away sycamore seedlings like the story of Johnny Appleseed going around the country planting apple trees. Several home places around Bluff City have them. We once had five large sycamore trees at our house, but all except the tree that produced this leaf have been cut.

According to news reports, the Bluff City school campus (formerly treeless) was planted with 63 sycamore trees in 1940. Several sycamore trees are still found at that location.