

Jerry McKelvy's  
**SANDYLAND CHRONICLE**

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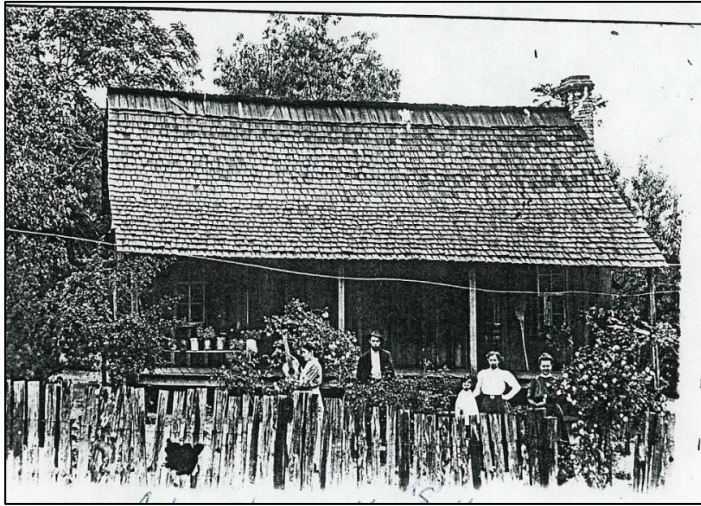
May, 2012

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**THE MAVIS GRIFFITH BELISLE STORY**

**Edited by Jerry McKelvy from information supplied by Mrs. Belisle**

My parents, sister, and I lived on a farm near my grandparent's. My Grandfather Hall, mother's father, passed away when I was about four years old—my first remembrance of death. He had flu and probably pneumonia when it was raging during World War I and my Grandmother Hall died a few months before I was born.



**The John Henry Hall home  
at Goose Ankle**

Mrs. Mavis Griffith Belisle was born here February 8, 1915.

The place was later sold to the Stone family.

Grandpa Griffith was a farmer who had come to Arkansas from Texas after losing his first wife in childbirth leaving him with four children. The oldest was William A. Griffith, my father, who was eight years old. My grandfather married after advertising for a wife or housekeeper to help him—a girl from Arkansas who went to Texas to get to know him and talked him into coming back to Arkansas so she could help out with her mother who had quite a large farm. There they bought quite an acreage and had four more children.

He had a sugar cane mill to make sorghum molasses, fruit trees (apple, peach, plum), berries, cotton, corn, etc. Times were rough with eight children to feed. He had breeding stock for



others to use. He had a blacksmith shop and a country store. He had turkeys, chickens, goats, sheep and a large stock pond. He fenced his place so he could upgrade the quality of his cattle, etc. The other farmers didn't do this since Arkansas was open range at that time. Pictured at left are Luke Meador, John Griffith, and Willie Griffith cutting ribbon cane on the farm of J.H. Griffith.

## SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

When I was just past four years and three months, my parents gave me permission to spend my first night away from home alone with some very dear neighbors who lived a short distance from us. I was so thrilled and really thought I was grown as this family had teenage girls. As I was washing my feet getting ready for bed, I saw my Dad coming across the field. He said, "I'll bet you will want to go home when I tell you about a little sister that you have at home". I could hardly wait. When we walked in one of the women (Mrs. Moore) was holding her giving her sweetened buttermilk. This was supposed to keep her from having thrush, I was told later.

She seemed so small and I knew I couldn't play with her anytime soon. But I began looking after her quite young. One day Mother said, "You watch your little sister while I go milk the cows. If she starts crying, just shake the bed, and she will go back to sleep." When she came in I had climbed into the bed holding on to the side and jumping as hard and as high as I could. Sis was being sent pretty high in the air. My dad laughed and said, "Well, she stopped her crying—she couldn't cry for trying to catch her breath." I supposed Mom explained and showed me how to shake the bed more gently.

My school began at Gum Grove near Bluff City, Arkansas. We walked one and one-half miles to school through rain and snow or whatever the weather with our lunch pail and book satchel, primer, striped lined tablet, and a penny pencil. The tablet had pictures on the back of Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford.

My uncle bought me my first tube of toothpaste (Colgate), a little tooth brush, and a tiny vial of perfume. Before this we made a mixture of salt and baking soda and made a mop from the tiny limb of the black gum tree or the root from a herb that my dad would dig for us to use for our teeth cleaning. I really was living it up having a real tooth brush and paste.

For our lunch we usually carried a baked sweet potato, slice of ham in a biscuit, and sometimes cake or pie—mostly fried dried apple or dried peach pie. Apples and fruits from our orchard lasted part of the school season.

That first year, I passed the primer, first grade and second grade and was ready for the third with my playmates and neighbors. My second year they were a year older, but their first year, I had to stay at home. They would show me their books and I had learned to print my ABC's and numbers with my mother helping me. So I could either read or know from memory all the primer stories—"Jack and Jill", "Little Miss Muffet", "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep", "Little Jack Horner", and "Jack and the Beanstalk", etc.

The school house had two large rooms with a stage in one end for plays, reading poetry, singing, etc. A pot-belly stove in each room for heat and we took turns with each of us staying by the stove for a few minutes and then return to our seat. Each school desk had a space to put our books, tablet, and pencil. It had an ink well on top. I used to slip jonquils in my ink and watch them change to blue.

Our neighbors were the Moores, Nelsons, Irvins, Plylers, Otswells, Henrys, Walters, and Meadors (Lucy Griffith married Luke Meador). I walked one and a half mile to school with these folks

# SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

and we had lots of fun, but sometimes we got to school with our feet wet and our mittens frozen and had to thaw out by the pot-bellied stove.

I remember my first airplane ride in 1919 about the time World War I ended. I was four years old and very excited. I also remember seeing my first automobile when Dad would have to jump out of the wagon and throw a blindfold over the team to keep them from running away with us. I also remember my mother making kraut, lye soap, hominy, and all the fruits and vegetables she canned and pickles and relish she made. Our first radio had a set of earphones, and we could only get two or three stations. If company came, the earphones were divided so each party could hold one piece to the ear.

*Note: Mrs. Belisle sent me a detailed description of the old Griffith place including a floor plan of the house and who resided in each room. She described the out-buildings and the house where a black couple (Dennis and Bertha) lived. On the same road was the house where Everett and Bessie (Griffith) Barlow lived when they married about 1919 or 1920.*

A black couple (Dennis and Bertha) helped us a lot. Dennis helped Grandpa with the stock and Bertha helped Grandma with cooking, washing, and ironing. She also helped with Grandma Irvin who lived there. We always had enough leftovers for Bertha to take home for their meals. They were great help and I loved them, but some of the neighbors didn't want a black family living there and threatened to burn them out, so they had to move. (Ku Klux Klan)

I remember one funny incident that happened while we lived there. There was a large branch or creek with a foot log crossing to the Foster place. The Fosters were of a different religion. The women wore long black dresses with white collars and they would come up to visit Grandma Irvin and try to sell her their religion making supper late for my Dad and other members of the family (who were Methodists). My Dad took care of the problem. He went down the road and climbed a tree near the creek which had cross vines hanging from it. He waited until nearly dark when Mrs. Foster was on her way home. He let out a panther scream and dropped from the tree using the vines. She missed the foot log and stepped in the creek. I remember him telling the tale many times about her feet going spat, spat, spat, then chug, chug, chug and her black dress whipping around her legs as she hit the other side running for home. Word got around pretty soon and most of the neighbors were out with their dogs, but Dad had made it back to the house and no one was the wiser. They hunted and hunted, but never found the big black panther that she had seen. If she visited after that, she left early and the men folks who had been working in the fields got their supper on time. Later on in a place alone, his dad got a confession out of him and he got a few licks with the belt, but he could see his dad was trying very hard to keep from laughing. No one else in the family knew about it for many years.

Then when I was nine years old, my parents sold our place and went to a community called Caney (Morris, now). It had a larger school, two churches (Baptist and Nazarene). It was probably 10-15 miles from where we had lived, but it was a long way to move by wagon. I remember it taking us most of the day. My sister (four years younger) held a little Bantam chicken (a pet) and I held Patsy, the black cat. The cows were herded behind and of course, the team was hitched to the wagon.

# SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

We passed the school (must have been recess or lunchtime) that we were to attend and many of the kids came down to wave hello to us. It was a very exciting time missing my friends and looking forward to meeting new ones. I didn't know whether to be happy or sad.

I attended school at Caney until the schools were consolidated and finished high school at Cale. I left there in 1934 for Memphis, Tennessee where I received my RN nursing degree.

## **How I Met My Husband**

When I moved from Knoxville, Tennessee to Dallas, I moved in with one of the RN's one year ahead of me who had married a very close friend of mine that I went to high school with (Jack Munn).

He kept telling me he'd like for me to meet a friend of his who worked at the same place making Blue Bonnet salad dressing. They made loads of it and took it to Army stations. One night he got in from delivering a load. Storms were coming into Dallas, so he called for his wife and me to come pick him up. Just as we got to the plant, the storm hit. He grabbed me and pitched me into a box car and ran back to the car to get his wife. By that time lights were out, wind was blowing, and torrents of rain were coming down. The box car door closed and I couldn't see anything. Then I heard a noise—a very nice voice saying “It will be OK. I'm over here. I'm Jimmie”. So we waited out the storm. You couldn't say it was love at first sight, because neither of us could see each other.

I was already signed up for the Army in Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. We were engaged a few months later and set our wedding date for Labor Day weekend in 1942. That would give us an extra day.

So, I set out from Ft. Sill to Dallas by bus and what do you think? The bus broke down in Bowie, Texas. I tried to get the bus driver to let me go make a telephone call to let them know at the church that I would be late, but he said, “No, it will only be a few minutes and I'll have to leave you if you are not here”. The few minutes turned into two hours. Jimmie said he met every bus from any direction and wore his shoes out walking and looking. The pastor, a friend of mine from Arkansas, said he had work to do at the church anyway and our witnesses and friends stood by.

With our stormy beginning and me almost missing my wedding, we made it together over 40 years before he passed away in 1982 and we had two precious children who I still enjoy plus grandchildren.

I have had so many happy times in my life. My love and being loved by Jimmie, the birth of our children and enjoying their first smiles, first words, first steps, first days of school, graduation from high school and college, etc. We had so much to share together.

We lived in Dallas from 1946-1973. After we retired and planned and built our new home in Pueblo, Colorado, we had such a challenge. I felt like we were in the pioneer days that I had read about. We did have water, gas, and electricity, but mail service was miles away. We had no telephone and no neighbors close by. We were grateful for the CB radios in our cars and

# SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

home. Jimmie sold and installed them in other homes and cars including doctors and policemen. This was a great help, but it was a great change from living in the big city of Dallas.

We had a Scout and traveled the old mining trails, got books and learned the history of the ghost towns and loved being in the mountains 35 miles from Colorado Springs and Pike's Peak. We were 28 miles from Royal Gorge. We would pack a lunch and take out to see what we could find—beautiful rocks, flowers, birds, and just enjoying looking at the mountains on some national forest road. Somehow it made me feel the words of the song “How Great Thou Art” and then look down and be reminded of “Peace in the Valley”.

But we were very active in getting Pueblo West to become a city. New neighbors were moving in and building homes and since we were the second home built on the north side of Hwy. 60, we started having coffee at different houses and greeting the newcomers as they moved in. We became involved in getting telephones, mail service, new churches, community center, etc.

Who said this was retirement? Jimmie was much busier than when we had regular hours at the post office, but what fun we had doing these things together and going and coming as we wanted with no time clock to punch.

We, with other members of Pueblo West, interviewed some of the old ranchers who had lived there before the property was bought for a community and city. We taped some of their tales of the Indians, first schools, got old photos and put it all together as the “Decade of Progress” showing and telling how the ten years had changed things.

Jimmie's health began to fail in 1979. He had aortic bypass surgery and continued to have health problems until his death in 1982 from a ruptured aneurysm. Even when he was having these problems, he continued to make the meetings and get the *Pueblo West Bulletin* out until he passed away. He won many citizens' awards during his years there.

I continued on with the *Bulletin*, telephone directory, etc and lived there until 1991. Then I retired here in Austin, Texas. My son, his wife, and grandchildren were here and my daughter lived in Amarillo, Texas.



Mrs. Belisle at Reader, Arkansas in 1988 with the steam train and at a building in Reader constructed for the filming of *The North and the South* television mini-series.



# SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

*Note: Mrs. Belisle sent me other family pictures and information about growing up in rural Nevada County. She seemed to enjoy sharing her memories of that time in her life. After I got this issue ready, I learned that Mrs. Belisle had passed away on March 8, 2012 at the age of 97. We offer our sympathy to her family.*

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## 500 LASHES FOR LYING

We have plenty of crime these days. News reports are filled with stories of murders, robberies, rapes, and other assorted crimes. These type news stories about crimes, fires, etc. seem to always make the headlines.

After spending many hours reading old newspapers, I have concluded that people might act a little more civilized these days than they did over a hundred years ago (with some exceptions). The old newspapers didn't mince words in their description of evil deeds. A headline might read "Farmer Knocks His Wife's Brains Out" or something similar. I am amazed at the number of crimes involving someone hitting someone over the head with an axe, splitting their skull. A gunshot seems much more humane than being hit over the head with an axe.

The newspapers in Nevada County tell of gunfights in the streets in Prescott in the late 1800s. Whiskey was sold freely and the town had several saloons. The railroad brought in people from all parts of the country--some good and some bad. There was a city marshal and a county sheriff to keep order. I'm sure they did their best, but things were pretty wild in Prescott in the late 1800s. Finally in 1908, about 400 of the leading citizens of Prescott met and voted to form a Law and Order Committee to help enforce the laws and things began to improve.

Sometimes people took the law into their own hands. There were several cases reported in surrounding counties of prisoners being taken from law officers by a mob and hanged. These mobs were made up of "up-standing citizens" of the community who felt that a trial was a waste of time and that justice should be carried out quickly. It seems that most of the people hanged by this vigilante justice were black men, especially those accused of assaults on white women.

Hanging seemed to be the choice method of execution in the late 1800s up until about 1910. A legal hanging was more like a spectator sport with large crowds of people gathered to watch the execution. The condemned man was usually given a chance to speak to the crowd. Sometimes prayers were said and hymns were sung. Sometimes the condemned man even thanked the sheriff for the good treatment he received while in jail. The illegal hangings--those done by mobs of citizens--were usually done at night with no crowds. No scaffold was needed. A good tree limb would serve the purpose. The condemned man might be left hanging until the next day to serve as a reminder to others. Little or no effort was made to prosecute the men who took the law into their own hands.



# SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

One unusual incident I read about happened in Camden, Arkansas in 1901. A man named Tom Watson and his wife swore that Will Bussey, a Negro, had assaulted Mrs. Watson. Bussey was sentenced to be hanged for the crime. Before the sentence was carried out, Mrs. Watson admitted that she had sworn falsely against Bussey. She said her husband had compelled her to give the false testimony. After her confession, the governor suspended Bussey's sentence for sixty days.

The citizens of Camden were so incensed about the false testimony that a committee of citizens decided to punish Watson. They gave him 500 lashes, placed him on a train headed south, and told him not to stop in Arkansas.

This news story was passed around to newspapers all over the country. It was quite unusual for someone to be given 500 lashes. I don't know what type of instrument was used, but it's hard to imagine someone being whipped that many times. There was no mention of any punishment of the citizens who carried out this whipping. Evidently, the citizens of Camden did not look kindly on someone who gave false testimony against another person.

After reading this story, I did a little research on whipping as a method of punishment. I learned that public whipping, also called flagellation, is still used in many countries, especially Islamic countries. Indonesia calls it caning, the subject being struck a certain number of times with a rattan cane about four feet long and a half inch thick that has been soaked in water to make it flexible. In that country, men age 18-50 are subject to caning and the maximum number of strokes is 24. A milder version of caning is used in the schools of Singapore as punishment for misbehavior and by parents is the discipline of their children. Indonesia has a list of 30 crimes for which caning may be used as punishment and it is administered under medical supervision. It is said that Singapore has one of the lowest crime rates in the world.

In the days of the Roman Empire, it was called scourging and was sometimes used as a prelude to crucifixion. We read in the Bible of Jesus being scourged before his crucifixion (Matt. 27-26). Paul, the apostle, mentions that five times he received forty stripes save one (2 Cor. 11-24).

I have a book called *Old Time Punishments* originally published in England in 1890. The book has a whole chapter on whipping. The crimes punished by whipping in England in earlier times included vagrancy, blasphemy, obtaining goods under false pretences, stealing, and mothers of illegitimate children along with the suspected fathers. The victim was tied to a whipping post or to a cart and usually whipped until the blood flowed. During the reign of King Henry VIII in 1530, the Whipping Act was passed which stated that vagrants were "to be tied to the end of a cart naked, and beaten with whips till the body shall be bloody by reason of such whipping". This book states that in some cases insane people were whipped along with people who had diseases such as smallpox.

I found several references in old newspapers of 500 lashes being given. It seems that

## SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

this was the maximum number of lashes given, and in some cases, this was done in installments instead of all at once. In all the cases I read about, the whipping was done by a group of citizens and not as punishment directed by a court.

A cat o' nine tails was often used to give these lashes. This was made with nine cords, sometimes knotted, attached to a handle. The cords were about two or three feet long. Each time the victim was struck was the same as receiving nine lashes at one time. The whipping usually resulted in broken skin on the person's back which took a long time to heal and sometimes left scars. Sometimes small pieces of metal were placed in the cords to do more damage. Some slave owners used whipping as punishment for slaves who tried to escape or for some other serious misbehavior.

Whipping was evidently a common thing in the late 1800s and was usually carried out by a mob, vigilantes, or committee of citizens, depending on what name you prefer. It was mentioned frequently in the old newspapers. I'm sure anyone who witnessed this or saw a person after he had received 500 lashes would think twice about doing something that might cause him to receive such punishment.

Parents, especially in the South, often used a limited version of this to keep their children in line. I'm sure some of you can remember being punished with a small peach tree switch when you did something wrong, and usually the parents made the child go to the peach tree and bring them the switch to be used for the punishment. I think most of the kids who endured such punishment turned out all right. I think a little correction now and then is a good thing as long as it is not carried to the extreme.

Corporal punishment is not used much these days in our schools and it has been the subject of much debate. It is still legal in 21 states, including Arkansas. Some of you who read this may have memories of being paddled when you were in school. The paddle was commonly used when I was in school, and I even paddled a few kids myself when I was teaching many years ago. It was not something I enjoyed doing and was used only after all other methods failed. There was a time when children who received a paddling at school were liable to get another paddling from their parents when they got home. I also remember the days when children who misbehaved during church services were taken out by their parents and spanked. I've seen kids in stores being completely disrespectful to their parents and badly in need of some sort of correction, but many parents are afraid to discipline their children in public these days lest some well-meaning person reports them to the police for brutality.

I didn't mean to get off on the subject of discipline of children at home and at school. It could all be connected, though. It's quite possible that children who have serious misbehavior problems as youngsters could very well have serious misbehavior problems as adults if not corrected. There has to be some form of punishment for misbehavior for both children and adults. Sometimes, just the threat of punishment is enough to keep most people in line. The possibility of getting a speeding ticket is enough to make most of us drive somewhere close to the speed limit.

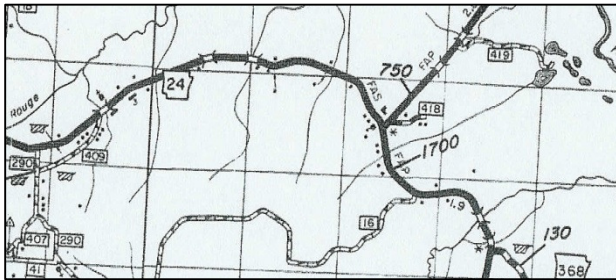


# SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Back to our story. I'm not sure how the story of Tom Watson and Will Bussey ended. The last account I could find was that Tom Watson was put on a train headed south after being given 500 lashes with instructions not to stop in Arkansas. Maybe he ended up in Louisiana. Nothing was said about Mrs. Watson. Maybe she accompanied him on the trip. Will Bussey's execution had been suspended by the governor for sixty days. A later news report stated that the judge decided the witnesses in the case were completely unreliable, but he went ahead and set August 3, 1901 as the execution date for Will Bussey. It was stated that the case would be appealed to the Supreme Court. Now I'm curious about the outcome. Was Will Bussey hanged or not? That is the question.

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## HOW TERRAPIN NECK GOT ITS NAME



Terrapin Neck is a community in Nevada County at the intersection of Hwy. 24 and Hwy. 53. The community has been called Terrapin Neck for at least 100 years. I can't prove how it got the name, but my theory is that the name came from how the highway on a map resembles the shape of a terrapin. Can you see the similarity from comparing the map above with the shape of the terrapin? I've wanted to get a good picture of a terrapin for a long time, and I found this fellow recently on my driveway when I went out to get the newspaper.

The official name of the community is New Hope, but most all the local folks know it as Terrapin Neck. If anyone knows a better story of how the community was named, please let me know. By the way, Terrapin Neck is not the only community in Nevada County with a colorful name. A few miles further south were the old communities of Goose Ankle and Possum Trot. I've also heard of Smash-Up and Lick Skillet.

<b>RAINFALL RECORD</b>		
January—3.3 in.	February—4.1 in.	March—10.0 in.

# SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

## POKE SALAD



My mother is fond of poke salad (*or poke salet*). In the springtime, she is always on the lookout for the young tender sprouts growing wild near her home. She is the only one in our family who cares for this Southern delicacy. I had always heard that the plant was poisonous and it should be harvested at just the right time and cooked in a certain way to avoid an upset stomach or worse. Most recipes call for bringing it to a boil three times, discarding the water each time. When the plant matures, it produces some dark berries which we called pokeberries. These berries are supposed to be poisonous, but birds eat them without harm. All parts of the pokeweed are poisonous, especially the roots, according to one web site. The plant should never be eaten raw and only the young sprouts used as food since the leaves become poisonous as the plant grows tall. Some say not to pick any leaves from the plant if any part of the stem is pink or red. You need to know what you are doing when harvesting and cooking poke salad greens.

Sometimes when I buy an expensive ink cartridge for my printer, I think about using some pokeberries for ink to save money. I have read that many letters written home by Civil War soldiers were written using poke berry "ink" and that the color turned brown with age.

According to some articles I've read, the plant is being studied for its medicinal qualities and could possibly be beneficial in the treatment of many diseases. Maybe the old folks knew something about this. One web site says the plant has been used in the treatment of bronchitis, swollen glands, rheumatoid arthritis, mumps, tonsillitis, and has the potential to be used as an anti-AIDs drug. New research has revealed that a possible cure for childhood leukemia may be found in the common poke weed. Folklore says Indians used pokeweed as a witchcraft medicine to purge the body by diarrhea and vomiting and would also expel evil spirits. The Indians also used the berries to make a dye used to decorate their horses and some of their possessions.

There was one food company (Allen's) that produced canned poke salad (or poke salet) for sale in the grocery stores, but I don't think it is still available.

Do you remember the song "*Poke Salad Annie*" from 1968? It reached No. 8 on Billboard's Top 100 hits that year. I think I've heard Elvis Presley sing it. I'm sure you can listen to it on YouTube.

Blanchard, Louisiana will celebrate their 38th annual Poke Salad Festival on May 7- May 12 this year. The festival includes a Ms. Blanchard Poke Salad Pageant for "girls of all ages" and also a Pokey Pet Parade where pet owners dress themselves and their pets for the parade. The festival includes many other activities. Sounds like fun!

What about you? Have you ever eaten poke salad?