

Jerry McKeiv's  
**SANDYLAND CHRONICLE**

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**THE U. S. SIGNAL SERVICE COMES TO PRESCOTT**

Most of the people living in Nevada County or anywhere in this part of Arkansas in the 1880s were farmers. I'm sure the weather was always on their minds since their crops needed favorable weather to produce well. Many of them probably believed in planting by the signs and had learned much about weather patterns by observing nature year after year.

These days we might check the weather forecast before planning any outdoor activity or before making a long trip in the winter. We can check weather radar to see the storms approaching. We have plenty of advance warning about hurricanes headed toward our shores. Having advance warning of a tornado approaching has saved countless numbers of lives. The weather forecasts are not always correct, but most of the time, they are pretty close with their predictions. We are fortunate to live in a high-tech world and probably don't appreciate some of these things as much as we should.

Those living in the days before radios and television were at the mercy of the weather. They didn't know if the storm approaching contained a tornado. They didn't know about a cold front headed their way that might bring a killing frost that would kill their crops. They studied Mother Nature closely, learning the signs of what the weather might be like for that season and relied on some of the weather folklore has been handed down from generation to generation.

Weather reports were pretty much unheard of until the telegraph became operational in 1845 and messages could be sent from one town to another to pass along weather information. The telegraph lines generally followed the railroads, so it took a long time for many cities to get railroad and telegraph service.

The U. S. Signal Service was first used by the military, but around 1870, it was assigned the duty of collecting weather reports from different places around the country. Weather observers were trained for the job and assigned to various reporting stations across the country. There were 24 observers at first, but the number soon was increased to over 200. These observers had to be unmarried men between the ages of 21 and 40 and since they were a part of the Army, they had to abide by strict Army regulations. They were required to go to their assigned posts three times per day (7:35 a.m., 4:35 p.m. and 11:35 p.m.) and take weather readings such as temperature, wind direction, barometric pressure, relative humidity, precipitation, etc. and transmit this information by telegraph to Washington, DC. The information was then transmitted to various locations around the country which had been selected to receive the reports. By collecting all this weather information over the years, the experts were able to better predict weather patterns across the nation.

These daily weather reports first came to Prescott in 1891. The U. S. Signal Service announced that Prescott had been chosen to receive these daily reports and it is interesting how this worked. It was based on displaying different flags depending on the type weather to be expected. The weather information was received by the local telegraph operator and I suppose he or someone

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else would put up a flag based on what weather report he received. Prescott had a flag pole for this purpose, probably located close to the telegraph office which I assume was located in a prominent place near the railroad or the depot.

Here are the flags used in Prescott in September, 1891, according to the local newspaper:

A white flag meant clear or fair weather.

A blue flag meant rain or snow.

A white and blue flag meant local rains.

A black triangular flag displayed above or below another flag meant higher or lower temperatures expected.

A white flag with a black square in the center meant a cold wave approaching.

I'm sure people in Prescott checked the flag pole each day to see what type weather was expected. These were large flags, about the size of the U. S. flags flying at public buildings today. It was a crude weather forecasting system, but better than nothing.

Hardly anything works perfectly all the time. I noticed in the newspaper in late 1891 that Prescott was experiencing a problem with this weather reporting system. Someone had taken the hoisting rope down from the flagpole and for several days no flags were flown. The flagpole was taken down and a new rope installed. Then there was some mix-up about the flags and a white flag which meant fair weather was flown for two days while it was raining. I can imagine the talk around town about the false weather reports.

The meteorological duties of the U. S. Signal Service began in 1870 and ended in 1891. The weather reporting duties were turned over to other government agencies after 1891. Prescott got in on the very end of this weather reporting system from the U. S. Signal Service using different flags to forecast the weather. I'm not sure if the flag system was continued on after 1891. It may have been of benefit to the people of Prescott, but those living in the rural areas of the county were still out of the loop as far as weather reports were concerned. They went about their work as usual, keeping one eye to the sky and wondering what type weather might be headed their way.

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## GOING BAREFOOT

The first day of May was when we were allowed to go barefoot when I was a kid. Some families had other dates, such as Easter. I can see why going barefoot was a common thing in the old days. Some families had eight or ten kids and buying that many shoes could be a big expense for a family, especially when the weather was warm and shoes weren't really needed.

Our feet became toughened by going barefoot until it was almost like wearing a pair of shoes. We could feel the cool dirt between our toes in the newly plowed ground. Later on when the days got hot, it was not all that pleasant. We had to run from one shady spot to another because of the burning sand on our bare feet.

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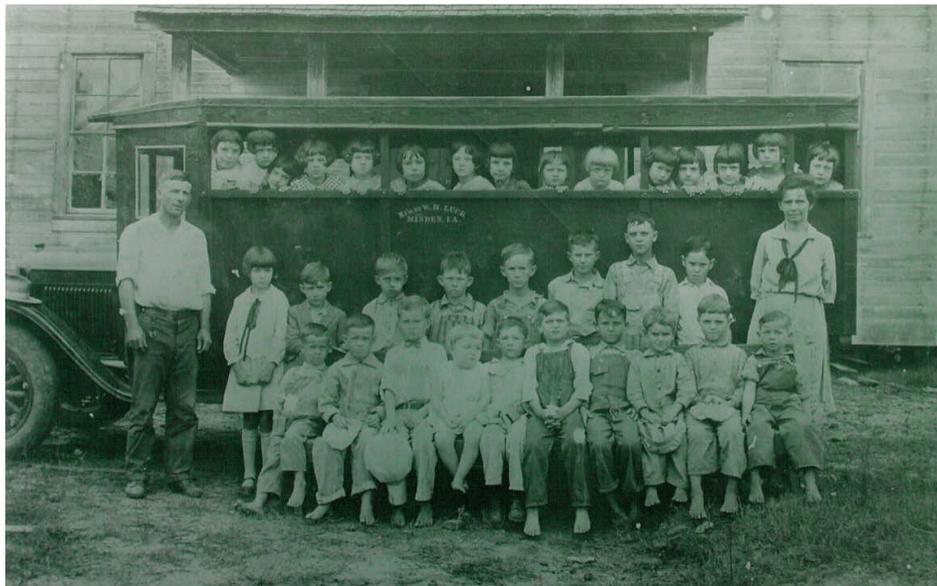
I've seen several pictures of school groups from the early days in which many of the students were pictured with bare feet. Their families probably couldn't afford to buy shoes or else it was just the custom to go barefoot.

Going barefoot pretty much ended at our house sometime in the 1950s when several in our family contracted hookworms. Hookworms are worse in sandy soil which we had plenty of, and especially around farms. They can get into a scratch or cut and spread throughout your body ending up in the intestines causing all manner of problems. The treatment for hookworms back in the 1950s was taking five very large pills followed by a large dose of castor oil with the treatment to be repeated a few days later.

I haven't heard of a case of hookworms in many years, but they say 740 million people in the world are infected with them especially in under-developed countries and in the southern part of the United States. Evidently, they were a problem in 1922 because the news reporter from Goose Ankle wrote, "The main problems here are hookworm, hog cholera, and H. C. L. (high cost of living)."

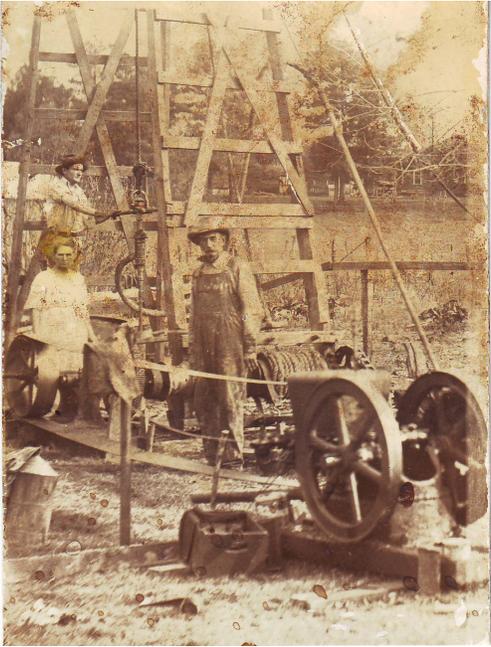
I don't see many kids these days going barefoot. Kids don't play outside as much as we did and are probably more interested in showing off the latest style of tennis shoes. Going barefoot these days is also limited due to the invasion of fire ants in our part of Arkansas plus all the sticker weeds we have. Anyone who has lived in the Sandy Land has memories of having a grass burr (or sand burr) stuck in your bare foot or maybe a stone bruise from going barefoot.

Did you go barefoot when you were a kid? Was there a certain date when you were allowed to go barefoot? Send me your comments for the next issue.



Bluff City school group about 1928-29. Notice all the young kids with bare feet. See bottom of page 10 for identification. This was the first bus used to bring students to Bluff City School. Some in this group were from Terrapin Neck.

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David E. Cornelius

A well digger and farmer in the Laneburg area of Nevada County

Photo from Dr. Annette Lemons

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## PET PICS



This is Nevada, Yellow Lab, 12 years old, companion of Jim and Charlotte Woody.



This is Kit, one of my favorite dogs. He died in 1996 after being hit by a car.

I still need more pet pics. Send me a picture of your pet, whatever it is, with just a sentence about it. Be sure and include the pet's name.

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## MY, HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED!



I'm glad I didn't grow up back in the days when plowing was done with a horse or mule. It's no wonder many of our ancestors died young. They worked themselves to death.

Imagine following a horse and plow all day like the fellow in this picture. Actually, this is a picture of my wife's grandfather, John Gribler, plowing a field on a farm in southeast Missouri. This looks like a pretty good field. I'm not sure if it was his farm or if he was working for someone else. Much of the land in that area is rocky. At least the plowing might have been a little easier here in the sandy land of Nevada County. I was always told that hard work never hurt anybody and maybe that's true. This man lived to be 88 years old. I suppose plowing like this was good exercise. Think of how many miles per day he probably walked following these mules. He was one of the first of his generation born in America and had five children, although one died as a young child.

My grandfather, James Columbus McKelvy, was also a farmer. He had a couple of horses named George and Lou. By the time I came along, my grandfather had reached the age where he was forced to quit farming and I don't have any pictures of him doing farm work. I can remember my father using a horse to skid logs out of the woods and help load them on the truck by rolling them up poles onto the truck. I was just a kid at the time and can't remember much about the horse. It was probably one of my grandfather's horses that he used.

We never had horses on our farm except for the time we kept Carl Greer's horse for a while in our pasture. I always liked horses. There is something peaceful about seeing them grazing in the pasture. Riding horses was one experience I missed out on growing up and now I'm afraid my body couldn't take much horseback riding.

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My father bought 86 acres of land near Bluff City in 1947. It was mostly hills and "hollers" with about 25 acres suitable for cultivation. The rest was timber land or land that was too badly eroded for row crops. The soil was mostly sand or sandy loam--good for growing most anything as long as it had plenty of water and fertilizer. The crops suffered during the long dry spells, but farming is a gamble anyway. Some years are good and some are bad, depending mainly on the weather.

Our first tractor was a Farmall Cub. These little tractors were made for small farms or large gardens and were very popular. They were sold from 1949 to 1964 and they say over 200,000 of these tractors were sold. They had several implements available including a breaking plow, disk, a sickle bar mower, a belly pan mower, and cultivators.

I spent many hours plowing with our little Cub tractor. We had two of them before my father finally decided to get a larger diesel tractor about 1968. The Farmall Cub tractors sold new for about \$1,000 back when we bought ours. They were built for work with no frills--just a basic tractor with simple controls.



I found this old picture of me on our Farmall Cub back in 1955. Most farm kids got their first driving lessons driving tractors on the farm or driving the truck while hauling hay.

After we got our new Ford diesel tractor, we wondered how we ever made it all those years with the little Cub tractor. The Ford was so much more powerful and was even equipped with a front-end loader. That tractor is still running over 40 years later although it could probably use a good tune up.

A tractor is a necessary piece of equipment to a farmer. Just as the farmers of the old days depended on a good horse or mule, modern-day farmers depend on a good tractor to get their work done.

Even though most folks had tractors when I was growing up, we still had some old horse-drawn farm equipment around which we sometimes still used. We just hooked it behind the tractor instead of a horse. We sometimes cultivated our watermelons by using a horse-drawn cultivator hitched to our tractor. My job was to drive the tractor very slowly while my father followed along behind the plow. We also sometimes used a horse-drawn planter pulled with the tractor to plant such things as peas, corn, and peanuts. After we got more implements for the tractor, these horse-drawn farm implements were retired from service.

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We also had cattle on our farm which called for growing hay. I even got in on hauling hay in loose with a pitchfork--a hard job if there ever was one. Again, we used the horse-drawn hay rake pulled behind the tractor to rake the hay into piles which we picked up with our pitchforks and loaded on our trailer and then unloaded by pitchforks at the barn. This is a picture of my mother and father hauling loose hay in 1974 on a small trailer pulled by our Ford tractor. The job was not completed until the loose hay had been unloaded into the

barn.

Sometimes we hired Hambric Cummings to bale our hay. He lived several miles away and usually lined up two or three farmers in the area who wanted their hay baled so he could do it all in one trip. Hauling hay that had been baled was so much easier than hauling it in loose, but it was still hard work.



Finally, my father decided to buy his own hay baler. The whole family pitched in to cut, rake, bale, and haul the hay into the barn. We sometimes hired someone to help, but mostly it was a family affair. Our hay baler was not one of the modern balers that turn out those nice round bales. This was one that made rectangular bales that we hauled to the barn by truck or trailer. This photo shows my younger brother loading these type bales from Mrs. Bernell Johnson's field at Goose Ankle in 1973.

As time passed, my brothers and I had other jobs but we always tried to help our father get the hay in the barn. We worked sometimes into the night after working at our regular jobs all day. It helped if the hay was to be hauled on the weekends, but as the saying goes, you have to make hay while the sun shines. Many times we had to work extra fast trying to get done before one of those afternoon heating showers got the hay wet. We always felt good when the hay was safely stored in the barn knowing that the cows would have something to eat during the winter months.

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Hay hauling was a job that gave teenagers a little spending money, and in the old days it was not too hard to find kids willing to work. I think it would be quite a bit harder these days to round up a crew willing to do this type work. Kids were paid by the bale in those days. The more you hauled the more money you made. When I was a kid the going rate for my cousins and me was a penny and a half per bale. If we hauled 1000 bales in a day, we were paid fifteen dollars. That was back in the 1960s when general laborers were paid a dollar an hour or forty dollars per week.

Farming has advanced like everything else over the years. The tractor is a necessary piece of equipment to a farmer and the type of tractor needed depends on what type farming is done and how large the farm is. The tractors changed the way farming was done and the old horse-drawn farm implements are now antiques. Even the old Farmall Cub tractors like the one we first used are now mostly seen in parades driven by people who like to restore old tractors. One in working condition these days might sell for as much as \$3500, over three times what it cost brand new. The horse and mule for plowing have gone the way of the cross-cut saw which was replaced by the chain saw.

I'm all for labor-saving devices and doing things the easiest way possible. I do sometimes wish I could have experienced (for a very short time) plowing with a horse-- just long enough to see how it was done. I am glad though, that I didn't grow up when I would have had to harness up old George and Lou and follow them all day plowing up a large field. I don't think my grandfather would have believed it if someone had told him that one day farmers would ride around in air-conditioned tractors equipped with radios, GPS, and computers to help them plow their fields. We should be thankful we live in these modern times with all the easier ways of doing things. I wonder what things will be like in another fifty to seventy-five years. What's next—robot farmers??

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## **116 YEAR OLD MAN INTERVIEWED** **(from the 10-27-1886 issue of *The Nevada County Picayune*)**

A reporter for the *Nevada County Picayune* interviewed Uncle Primus Miliner, a colored man from Ouachita County who was visiting in Prescott.

Reporter-- "Well, Uncle, we want to know your name, age, and history, if you have no objections to give the same for publication."

Uncle Primus-- "All right, I don't object. My name is Dr. Primus Miliner; as to my age, I don't exactly know, but I can tell you what I know of myself."

Reporter-- "Where were you born, and what are your first recollections?"

Uncle Primus-- "I was born at Charleston, SC on Beanfair St. I was first owned by Dr. Sedgewick Louis Simmons. I was 13 years old when Gen. Francis Marion fought the British around Charleston and over S. C., and was with my young master at the fight he made between

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and on the islands of Cumbee and Acabee. I remember having seen many of the old Revolutionary War heroes, among them General Lafayette and John Adams. One of my young masters was under Gen. Washington and knew him well and I often heard of the General through him.”

(After consulting our Appleton’s Cyclopedia on Marion, and finding he fought in S. C. from 1760 to 1780, we said: )

Reporter-- “This would make you about 116 years old, taking into account the average of Marion’s warfare. Well, tell us of your journeying, masters, marriages, and general experiences.”

Uncle Primus-- “I lived in South Carolina the first forty or fifty years, then moved to Alabama, where I remained quite a long time, and then came to Camden, Arkansas, and have lived in Ouachita County ever since. When I came to Camden, there was only one store there, kept by Israel Hill and Mr. John Hawkins, now of Prescott, was the only carpenter there. About 30 years ago Mr. J. T. Ferguson, also of Prescott, was postmaster at Camden. I was owned by about five different men; don’t know how many times I’ve been married, but a great many. I have enjoyed very good health in the main, but had a spell of rheumatism some years since that hurt me terribly, and crooked up my limbs.”

Reporter-- “What do you do, Uncle Primus, and is life still a pleasure?”

Uncle Primus-- “Oh yes. I do little odd jobs, knock around, and read much of my time. Am here now for the first time, visiting my young mistresses, Mrs. Dr. Hinton, Mrs. John Merrell, and Miss Kate Clifton. I used to belong to their father.”

This ended the interview, and after thanking the old Negro, and promising him a paper, he left. We had him to read some from a paper, which he did without the use of glasses. Uncle Primus is quite intelligent and quite a curiosity. He is assuredly over a hundred years of age, no one knowing his exact age. Mr. J. T. Ferguson, who has known him for near 45 years, says he was a very old man when he first saw him, and is satisfied he is over a hundred, though he may not be 116 years of age.

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Another article about Primus Miliner appeared in a Camden paper (date is unknown). In this article, entitled "Stories of Faithful Slaves", he is called "our late distinguished colored citizen, Dr. Primus Mininer". It stated that he claimed to be 116 years old for at least ten years before his death. He claimed to have been a body servant to Gen. Francis Marion. He was owned by Mr. Nathan Clifton, the first architect and builder who came to settle in Camden. For many years after the war, Primus lived in his own little home in South Camden, only emerging from his dignified seclusion on election days or when a circus or barbecue was on hand. When visitors from the North were in town, we always took them to call upon Uncle Primus as one of our historical landmarks, and it was quite worthwhile to hear him tell of the glories of Camden "before de war".

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Remember back in the December, 2011 issue when I included a picture of a very large sycamore leaf? Denise Link, a local artist and friend, asked me if I would get her some of those large leaves to use in her art class. So I got a ladder and gathered about 30 or 40 of the best leaves I could find and gave them to her. The other day she presented me with this painting she had done using one of the leaves. To give you an idea of the size of the leaf, this painting is in a 16 x 20 inch frame. It just goes to show that many common things in nature can be made into something even more beautiful if you have the talent to do it.

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## OL' COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO

This is a true story about my neighbor Darrel's rooster.

I think that "Ol' Cock-A-Doodle-Doo" may be the last remaining rooster in the city limits. I awake every morning around 5:00 am. I have myself a cup of coffee and off to store down the street for a little breakfast and a visit with friends. After my breakfast I drive back home to wake the neighbor's rooster; he's been need of a little help lately. When I pull into the driveway I honk my horn twice. I tell you, "Ol', Cock-A-Doodle-Doo" could wake the dead then. I think maybe sometime in the past he might have fell off of his roost and broken his clock. Or maybe he's a little blind because he crows when the train blows its whistle while passing during the night. Darrel, my neighbor, says he is ready for the pot. So I do my best to help "Ol', Cock-A- Doodle-Doo" out as much as I can. It has been a little over a year now that I have been helping this old friend. -----Submitted by Bobby Newman—Altus, AR.

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Bus driver—Lloyd Cummings; Back row standing: Mary Lee Walker; Glen Greer; ??; Hambric Cummings; Larnell Nichols; Loyce Hildebrand; Edward Beaver; Stell Meador; Teacher—Mrs. Erwin---Seated: Harley Cummings; R. L. Cummings, Jr.; Chester ??; Helen ??(sister to Chester); Hoyt Cummings; Howell Byrd; George Henry; Odell Starnes; Verdell Starnes; Jack Starnes  
In the bus: Mollie McGee; Elloene Moore; Helois Morrow; Christine Barlow; Doris Steed (?); Edrie McGee; Mavis Nichols; Geneva Henry; Myra Sue Byrd; Eva Dell Neal; Joyce Dale Byrd; Emma Lee Byrd; Evelyn Henry; Imogene Morgan

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## COMMENTS FROM READERS

Among my earliest of memories after my family moved back to Arkansas is a very dim remembrance of going out as a group and hunting Poke Salad; mother being very cautious about little small me even touching the plant lest I fall over dead on the spot.

I don't recall the cooking process back then (..in the late '40s and very early '50s..) but there was usually a lotta steam coming from the kitchen stove in general and Poke Salad would be only one item among many being "biled up": mustard and collard greens along with other veggies of every description as well as canning were all fairly regular activities.

Nearly every neighbor on our block had vegetable gardens and chickens even though we were in the middle of Little Rock, so we never lacked for eggs or chicken or even fish since one of the fellows who rented a room a few doors down was out on one of the nearby lakes nearly every weekend.

Talk about a cornucopia....!!!  
Duncan McKelvey (Georgia)

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Yes I have eaten poke salad. Used to scramble eggs with it. Seems I remember Mom par boiling, but she could have boiled 3 times, and yes it had to be young. I now open a can of spinach, dump it in a skillet, cook until liquid is gone, put in a little butter or olive oil, break a couple eggs into it, cook till done, and eat it with toast. It is good-very similar to poke salad and scrambled eggs

Charlie Weaver (Georgia)



**Can you identify this plant? Many of our ancestors used it as an herbal remedy by making a tea from the dried leaves. Send me your guess.**

## RAINFALL RECORD FOR 2012 (at my house)

January----	3.3 inches	February--	4.1 inches	Total-----	21.2 inches
March-----	10.0 inches	April-----	3.8 inches		

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I found this nice looking bottle the other day. It is clear glass with no markings. I was wondering what product came in a bottle such as this. Send me an email if you think you know.

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I now have my first booklet *Have You Ever Been to Goose Ankle?* and the second booklet called *Diggin' Deeper* in PDF format and available on a CD if anyone is interested. Sorry, printed copies are no longer available. You can have a copy of one book on a CD for \$7.00 or both books for \$10.00. This price includes postage.

*Have You Ever Been to Goose Ankle?* is 120 pages of text and pictures about the area around Bluff City, Gum Grove, Goose Ankle, Dill's Mill, Theo, Foss, and Zama.

*Diggin' Deeper* is 65 pages and is sort of a follow-up to the first booklet with text and pictures (more information about the same area).

I also have three cemetery books available which contain the names of people buried in each cemetery with condensed obituary and other information about many of the people buried there. These are active cemeteries and I add information to the files as burials take place or when I get new information about someone buried there. You will receive the latest updated copy.

THEY PASSED THIS WAY--(Bluff City Cemetery)--142 pages (\$7.00)

SILENT VOICES --(Ebenezer Cemetery) ---130 pages (\$7.00)

CANEY CEMETERY--A RECORD OF BURIALS--- 58 pages (\$7.00)

Two cemeteries on one CD for \$10.00 or all three cemeteries on one CD for \$12.00  
Send check to Jerry McKelvy, 2680 Warren Ave., Camden, AR 71701