

Jerry McKeiv's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Vol. 13 – No. 8

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August, 2013

DEVELOPMENT OF NEVADA COUNTY SCHOOLS

Mr. Basil Munn gave a speech to the Prescott Rotary Club in 1948 in which he told of the development of schools in Nevada County. Many of the facts in this article came from his speech.

Nevada County was created in 1871 and consists of 620 square miles. The county was first divided into eight political townships with one school district in each township. Later five more townships were created--Leake, Boughton, Georgia, Parker, and Emmet making 13 school districts in the county. The population of the county in those early days was low and not every community had a school.

Between the years 1876 and 1908, 76 more school districts were added making a total of 89 districts in the county. Population was increasing rapidly reaching a peak about 1920. The county had over twice as many people in 1920 as it does today.

Creeks were used as boundaries for many of these early districts which eliminated students having to cross swollen streams in the days before school buses. The average size of these districts was about a three mile radius from the school. Depending on where a student lived, he or she might be required to walk up to three miles to school each day. Most of these early rural school buildings were one or two room wooden structures heated by wood stoves. School sessions were planned to not interfere with the planting and harvest seasons since students were needed at home during those times. Most people living in the rural parts of the county were farmers. Some families had several kids and some of these school districts had as many as 200 students. Some of these early districts only existed for a year or two and were then absorbed by an adjoining district. Some districts could not raise enough money to continue to operate.

Mr. Munn mentioned the names of some of these early schools in his speech. He says there were two Ebenezers, three Pleasant Hills, two Rocky Colleges, and three Antiochs. One school was called Lone Star and one was called Zama which the local people pronounced as "Zamer". Some were named for springs--Mineral Springs, Rock Springs, Bluff Springs, Pine Spring, Holly Springs, Siloam Spring, Cornelius Spring, and Lackland Springs. Some were named for timber such as Forest Hill, Hickory Grove, Pine Grove, and Gum Grove. Others were named for a prominent family such as Sneed's, Waldrep, DeWoody, Mendenhall, Buchanan, Ward's Chapel, Westmoreland, Brown, Cecil, Lane Mill, Harrison, Water's Chapel, and Barksdale. Some were named for animals like Terrapin Neck and Goose Hill.

The county had an official whose duties included examining teachers, conducting teacher institutes, making annual reports, etc. This office has had various titles

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including County School Officer in 1874, County Examiner in 1920, and then County Superintendent of Schools.

Mr. Munn included in his presentation some facts taken from the annual report of George Gatlin for the 1888-89 school year such as:

White males (1902); white females (1111)
Percent attendance for whites (67%)
Colored males (426); colored females (437)
Number of districts (65)
Number of male teachers (66)
Number of female teachers (21)

It is interesting to note that male teachers seemed to be preferred over female teachers in the late 1800s and most of them were called "Professor" at that time.

Teacher's licenses at that time were called First Grade, Second Grade, and Third Grade. A First Grade male teacher made \$45/month. A female First Grade teacher made \$35/month. A male teacher having a Second Grade license made \$37.50 per month and a female with a Second Grade license made \$30 per month. Male Third Grade teachers made \$27.50 per month and female Third Grade teachers made \$25 per month. The type license (First, Second, or Third) was based on how much college work the teacher had completed.

In 1929, many of these smaller schools were consolidated. School buses were available to take students to school so the districts could cover a greater area. The number of districts went from 89 down to 41 with five major schools in the county besides Prescott (Bodcaw, Willisville, Laneburg, Bluff City, and Cale). New brick school buildings were constructed in some communities about that time to accommodate the larger number of students after consolidation.

No community likes to lose its school as a result of consolidation and the process takes time. The Gum Grove school district near Bluff City filed a law suit against the Bluff City district over consolidation. The circuit court ruled against Gum Grove and the case was appealed to the Arkansas State Supreme Court which upheld the circuit court's decision. I have tried to find details about this case but have been unsuccessful. A new brick school was constructed at Bluff City and students were brought in from Gum Grove, Theo, DeWoody School, and Terrapin Neck. Other communities over the county went through the same process of consolidation about that time.

Schools became more modern as the years went by with better equipment. School lunch programs were started so that students could get hot meals at school instead of having to bring lunches from home. Schools competed with other schools in sports, mainly basketball and baseball. Some schools planted gardens to provide vegetables for use in the school cafeteria. Parents and teachers joined together (the PTA) in various projects to help raise money for the schools. The length of the school term

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gradually became longer with schools in session from September until May. Compulsory attendance laws were passed by the state which required students of certain ages to attend school.

As population decreased in the county in the years following World War II, more schools were consolidated. One of the five major rural districts (Bluff City) consolidated with Prescott in 1951. Several small rural districts in the southern part of the county continued to operate until the mid-1980s when it became clear that they could not meet the standards set by the state. After many studies and public meetings, it was decided to build a new school at Rosston which would include the districts of Cale, Willisville, Bodcaw, Laneburg, and Oak Grove. The new district opened in 1988 and was called the Nevada School District.

Today there are only three school districts in Nevada County (Prescott, Emmet, and the Nevada district at Rosston). Over a period of about 100 years, the number of school districts in the county was reduced from 89 to three.

NEVADA COUNTY POPULATION FROM CENSUS RECORDS

1880	----	12,959
1890	----	14,832
1900	----	16,609
1910	----	19,344
1920	----	21,934
1930	----	20,407
1940	----	19,869
1950	----	14,781
1960	----	10,700
1970	----	10,111
1980	----	11,097
1990	----	10,101
2000	----	9,955
2010	----	8,997

As you can see, the period from 1910 to 1940 was a time of growth in Nevada County. In the days after World War II, many people left the farms to take jobs in larger cities. The size of families also declined. Most young people were forced to leave the area in order to find work. Most counties in south Arkansas have a similar record of population decline.

The map on the next page shows the location of schools in northeast Nevada County at various times. I may have missed some of the very early schools. There are no schools operating in this area today. Students are now transported to schools at Prescott or Rosston.

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Legend for School Map on Page 4

- A—Upchurch School —(African-American)
- B---Lyda School—(possible school here in early 1900s)
- C---New Hope School (also called Terrapin Neck; consolidated with Bluff City in 1929)
- D---Reader School (consolidated with Chidester)
- E---DeWoody School (consolidated with Bluff City in 1929)
- F---Lackland School (was active in 1928)
- G—Bluff City School (new location of school in 1930)
- H---Bluff City School (location of school from 1910 to 1930)
- I --- Gum Grove School (consolidated with Bluff City in 1929)
- J--- Westmoreland School
- K---Weaver School (served the community of Weaver)
- L---Caney Creek School (located at Morris; consolidated with Cale)
- M—Possum Trot School (consolidated with Cale)
- N---Ebenezer School (operated in early 1900s)
- O---Zama School (served Zama community in early 1900s)
- P---Harmony School (active in early 1900s; served the Foss community)
- Q—Theo School (small school consolidated with Bluff City in 1929)
- R---County Line School (active in early 1900s)
- S---??? School—found reference in a deed about a school at this location; name unknown
- T---Hopewell School—(shown on 1925 map)
- U---Cale School—(consolidated into Nevada School District in 1988)
- V---Oak Grove School (African-American); consolidated with Cale School
- W---Carolina School—(shown on 1925 map)
- X---Water's Chapel School (African-American)
- Y---Rosston School (school here in early days before consolidation with Prescott; location of new Nevada School District in 1988)

PEDDLING IN CAMDEN

As a farm boy growing up in the country, any opportunity to visit a larger town was welcome. We lived near Bluff City about 23 miles from Camden which to me seemed like a very large city in the late 1950s. There were no big discount stores at that time and the downtown area was bustling with activity.

Each summer I usually got to go to Camden on our peddling trips. We raised all types of crops on our farm besides having cattle and chickens. One of the main crops was watermelons which we sold wherever we could. We also had purple hull peas, butterbeans, squash, cucumbers, tomatoes, etc. We sold our produce to our neighbors and people passing through, but about once each week in the peak season, my dad and I would load up our pickup truck and make a peddling trip to Camden. Our truck would be piled high with melons, cantaloupes, and any vegetables that were in season.

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Our usual method of peddling our produce was to drive down the streets looking for people sitting on their porches. We would holler out to them asking if they needed a watermelon. Some people find it hard to resist a nice watermelon on a hot summer day. Soon somebody would act interested and we would stop our truck. Nearby neighbors might also venture out to check out the produce. We soon learned that if we could get a small crowd of people out by the truck, we could usually sell several melons at one stop.

Our prices in those days were probably cheaper than the stores charged and the produce was much fresher. A good-sized watermelon in those days could be purchased for fifty cents or maybe seventy-five cents for a really large melon. A large cantaloupe might sell for a quarter.

We met some interesting people on our peddling routes. Many of the people had been raised on farms and told us stories of their experiences on the farm before moving to the city. Some people tried to haggle about the price of a melon and usually an amount was agreed to that would satisfy both parties.

I remember one older lady who wanted to be sure the melon was ripe before she bought it. She insisted that it be "plugged". That means a small plug was cut out of the melon and pulled out so she could inspect it to make sure it was ripe. Another lady wanted a melon really bad, but all she had was a silver dollar that she had been saving. She wanted to know if my dad would keep the silver dollar and return it to her on the next trip in exchange for paper money. My dad agreed to do that and she went ahead and purchased the melon.

We never had any thoughts of being robbed while peddling even though we sometimes peddled in some of the least desirable parts of the city. By the end of the day, my dad would have a pocket full of cash money--as much as most people made in a week. It would have been easy for someone to pull a gun and take the money, but nothing like that ever happened and we never even thought about it at the time.

We also hit the better sections of town, driving down nice residential streets like Sharp St. knocking on doors asking the ladies if they needed any farm produce. Most people were very friendly and were happy to get fresh vegetables. Sometimes the door would be slammed in our face. Some people worked at night and slept during the day and did not take kindly to being awakened from their sleep.

My job was to carry a melon or whatever the person purchased into the house for them. It was nice to be able to get inside an air-conditioned home for a few minutes on those hot summer days. I remember one house in particular that was kept cooler than most. We did not have air conditioning in our home, so I guess that's why those cool homes made such an impression on me.

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When it came time for lunch, we usually drove to some drive-in eating place like The Cowbell on California St. near the hospital. Sometimes we picked up something at Snappy Service, a small eating establishment near the Malco Theater. We usually ordered a hamburger and a milk shake--something else I didn't get at home. Lunch was one of the highlights of the day for me.

Around mid-afternoon, we would be getting tired and ready to go home. The vegetables had usually been sold, but we would have fifteen or twenty watermelons left to sell. We would then hit some of the smaller stores in town and offer the whole lot at a reduced price so the store could resell them and make a profit. I was always glad when someone agreed to take all the melons on our truck and we could call it a day. Some merchants in town bought produce from local farmers, so we usually stopped by those sometime during the day--stores like Hagy's on Washington St., Mae Coan's, and Palmers on South Adams St. They couldn't pay as much because they had to make a profit, but they usually bought quite a bit at once.

We made these peddling trips to Camden about once each week during the peak of the season. My mother also had a peddling route in Camden selling eggs, butter, and milk. Her customers would tell their friends and soon she had a list of several good customers including doctors and lawyers in some of the better sections of town. Some of them would even leave the doors open for her so she could put the eggs, butter, or milk in the refrigerator if they happened to be gone that day. I don't think that would be advisable these days and if I were a peddler now, I wouldn't want to go in someone's house without them being there.

I sometimes went along with her on her peddling route. I remember one house on a street behind some of the historic homes on Washington St. It was a two story house and the lady had a maid who answered the door and took care of the items the lady of the house wanted. When it came time to pay, the lady came out from a room on the second floor and dropped a check down to the maid who paid us. I remember the check swirling around as it fell to the floor and that also made an impression on me at the time.

I'm sure there are laws today that would prevent peddling like we did in those days due to government regulations or laws against peddling on the streets. Camden does still have farmer's markets in town where people can buy fresh farm produce. Given a choice, I would rather buy produce from these local farmers than purchase that grown in far off places and brought to the grocery stores.

It's been almost sixty years since our peddling days in Camden. Things have changed a lot during that period of time--some for the better and some for the worse.

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The answer to last month's "What Is It?" is a loom shuttle bobbin holder used in weaving. Don't ask me how it works. Betty Thomas was the only person to correctly identify this item. If you have an unusual item, send it to me and I'll include it in a future issue.



WHO IS IT?

This face was very familiar to our mothers and grandmothers. If you know who it is or would like to take a guess, let me know your answer by August 15th.

RAINFALL RECORD

Jan.—4.3 inches; Feb.—2.8 inches; Mar.—4.1 inches; Apr.—3.7 inches; May—4.2 inches; Jun.—4.2 inches; July— 1.4 inches as of July 24

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A fourth grade teacher collected old, well known proverbs. She gave each kid in her class the first half of a proverb, and asked them come up with the rest.

As you shall make your bed, so shall you.....mess it up.

Better to be safe than.....punch a fifth grader.

A miss is as good as a.....mr.

Strike while the.....bug is close.

It's always darkest before.....daylight savings time.

Never under estimate the power of.....termites.

You can't teach an old dog new.....math.

If you lie down with the dogs, you'll.....stink in the morning.

Love all. Trust.....me.

The pen is mightier than the.....pigs.

An idle mind isthe best way to relax.

Where there is smoke, there is.....pollution.

A penny saved is.....not much.

Two's company. Three's.....the Musketeers.

Don't put off until tomorrow what.....you put on to go to bed.

Laugh and the whole world laughs with you; cry and.....you have to blow your nose.

None are so blind as.....Helen Keller.

Children should be seen and not.....spanked or grounded.

If at first you don't succeed.....get new batteries.

When the blind leadeth the blind.....get out of the way.

Don't bite the hand that.....looks dirty.

You can lead a horse to water but.....how?

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A LOOK BACK TO AUGUST, 1934 (*Nevada County Picayune*)

Nevada County, along with the rest of the country, was in the midst of The Great Depression. Times were very hard and the weather was not cooperating at all to help the farmers. All but 17 counties in Arkansas had been added to the drought relief list in August, 1934.

Twenty-six carloads of cattle arrived in Prescott from the drought-stricken northwestern states. They were temporarily pastured in a field near DeAnn Cemetery. An ERA project was almost completed with 4000 acres being fenced in the Little Missouri River bottoms north of Prescott. When the fencing was completed the cattle were moved there. Five "range riders" were selected to care for the cattle being pastured there.

It is always interesting to look at the advertisements in the papers from long ago. Ozan Mercantile Co. advertised 10 pounds of sugar for 52 cents. Joe Boswell, Clothier advertised a pair of men's black wing-tip high heel oxford dress shoes for \$1.98.

Any form of entertainment was popular in the summer of 1934. The Daring Aces Flying Circus presented an air show in Prescott at the old airport on the Washington Road including a parachute jump. Admission to the show was 25 cents for adults and 10 cents for children. A car, truck, or wagon containing any number of people could enter the grounds for \$1.00. The National Guard patrolled the Washington Road to keep people from parking along the road to watch the show.

Community activities went on as usual during the hot month of August. Rosston and Bluff Springs had announcements about meetings of their ladies' clubs. The 37th annual camp meeting was held at the Main Spring Campground near Prescott. Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Martin celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary.

Several interesting memorials and life sketches were published for people who had recently passed away. A sketch of the life of W. E. "Ed" Fairchild was found in the August 16th edition. There was also an article about Mrs. J. H. Ridling (maiden name was Martha Jobe) who is buried at Friendship Cemetery. A touching memorial tribute was found for Frank Sandifer, a 13 year old boy who is buried at Falcon Cemetery. These articles give a lot of detailed family information for those doing genealogy research.

Many communities had local news columns in the county paper in 1934, including New Hope, Plyler's Station, Friendship, Weaver, Goose Ankle, and Laneburg. I even found a couple of tidbits concerning my own family. Herman McKelvy (a first cousin once removed) was recovering from a snake bite and "Grandmother" McKelvy (my great grandmother) was recovering from a fractured arm. You never know what kind of information you might find by reading old newspapers.

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LOCAL NEWS

It's typical summertime weather for Arkansas—hot, dry, and lots of humidity. The sandy land around Bluff City needs a good rain badly. There have been some scattered showers in the last week or so. After six weeks of no rain, every drop we get is appreciated. Two of the three ponds on our family land are still very low from the drought last summer and have not yet recovered.

David Barlow and Eddy McKelvy had good luck fishing on the Ouachita River in early July. They caught two large catfish—one weighing 36 pounds and another weighing 26 pounds. Then a day or two later they caught one that was even larger. They got the fish in the boat and on a stringer, but somehow the stringer malfunctioned and the fish fell back into the river as they were carrying it. They estimate it would have weighed from 40 to 50 pounds--another one of those “the big one got away” stories which left some very disappointed fishermen.

Mrs. Mary Laverne Carter Rippey, age 94, passed away July 3, 2013 in Fairfield, California. She was born in Bluff City in 1919 to Walter and Vera Gulley Carter. She taught school at Bluff City in 1939. She was married to William W. Rippey. She was my second cousin and other relatives and friends still live in Nevada and Ouachita counties. Our sympathy is extended to her family.

The annual revival meeting was held the second week in July at the old Serepta Spring camp shed. This is an annual affair and a tradition in Nevada County for over a hundred years.

I bought a watermelon to celebrate the Fourth of July and paid \$6.00 for it which is the most I ever paid for a watermelon. At least it was a good one. I can't get used to the prices these days. Some locally grown melons are being sold for \$8.00 or more and purple hull peas for over \$20 per bushel. Fertilizer and seeds are expensive not counting the labor involved in growing fresh produce. All I can say is if you don't like the prices, try raising your own.

My watermelon patch looks pitiful this year. I've tried to keep a few hills watered, but it looks like most of mine will be small and deformed. I blame it on the drought, but my farming techniques may be partly to blame.

I made a trip the other day over part of my old school bus route which I had back about 1970 when I taught school at Cale. It brought back a lot of memories, but I was amazed at how many of the old homes where I once picked up school kids that are now completely gone and all grown up with weeds. There is a large area of eastern Nevada County from just south of Bluff City to Hwy. 278 that has gone back to timberland. Only a few scattered deer camps remain and you can count the population on one hand.