

Jerry McKelvy's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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TELEPHONES

We have come a long way since Alexander Graham Bell made the first telephone call in 1876 and said “Mr. Watson, come here. I want to see you”. The invention of the telephone had a dramatic effect on the way people communicated with others. By 1880, there were about 50,000 telephones across America. Big cities got phone service first.

Of course, the larger towns in Nevada County got telephone service before the rural areas. I’m not sure when Prescott first got telephone service, but it was reported in the Picayune issue of May 5, 1892 that Mr. W. L. Webb was putting in a telephone line from his saddle shop to his residence. There must have been some type of telephone system in Prescott at that time.

In June, 1906, it was reported that an electrical storm at Prescott had burned out 200 telephones and caused damage to the switchboard at the electric power plant. It was reported in August, 1907, that residential telephone rates in Prescott were \$1.50 per month.

By 1908, telephone service had reached some of the smaller communities. Sutton had phone service that year. W. E. Sutton was called “our telephone man controlling the central office”.

At Morris in February, 1908, it was reported that Rev. Waddle and Riley Whitten had put up a mile of phone line one Saturday, reaching from Waddle’s to Dr. Thompkins where it connected to the independent line.

It was reported in February, 1909, that a phone line had been erected from Cale to Bluff City and would be extended to Sayre soon and that boxes would be up in a few days. There was a phone line from Bluff City to Chidester via Foss in 1909.

The same year, Albany Township (the area around Sutton) reported that a new telephone company was being organized there which would cover most of Albany Township.

In August, 1910, a telephone had been installed at the home of Mr. Garner at Piney Grove for the people of that section.

Prescott had a two-week telephone strike in June, 1914. The company had decided to raise the telephone rates, so 178 patrons discontinued using their phones. A mass meeting was held after two weeks and the company decided to leave the rates as they were.

In 1928, the Mt. Pisgah reporter stated that the Mt. Pisgah Telephone Co. was repairing their lines which was badly needed. The reporter wondered what they would have to grumble about to the switchboard lady after the lines were repaired.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Waterloo reported in September, 1929, that an asphalt factory would soon be in operation there and that the town was growing rapidly. Many new homes had been built. They reported a new post office and stated that Waterloo now had telephone and telegraph service.

In some of the very rural areas, the telephone wire was attached to trees along the roads instead of using telephone poles. I've heard some of the older folks say they disconnected the wire from their homes during storms because they were afraid lightning might run in on the wire and set their house on fire. Someone in each community operated the switchboard. The customer would have to ring up the switchboard operator and have them put the call through to the other party. We have all seen the old-type telephones on TV shows, usually a wooden box hanging on the wall with a crank on one side, the mouthpiece on the front, and the receiver which had to be held up to the ear.

Early phone numbers were only two or three digits. Telephone service improved over time and more modern looking phones were invented. Still, most people in the rural areas did not have phone service. We lived a short distance from Bluff City, but we didn't have a telephone at our house in the 1950s. I remember once in 1954 when three members of a black family living near us were murdered one night during a domestic dispute. One of the family members ran to my grandfather's house for help and he had to go to the state nursery to find a phone to call the sheriff.

I think we got our first phone sometime around 1964. It was a four-party line, so conversations could be heard by any of the other parties who happened to pick up the phone. Some of you may remember dealing with party lines.

I think everyone, especially the young people, were excited to finally get phone service. The early phones were black and had rotary dials, but soon they began to be available in other colors. Some could be mounted on the wall or you could get a desk type phone. Early phone numbers had a two-letter prefix before the number. Ours was OV5-2858. The OV stood for Overbrook. Camden's phone prefix was TE for Temple and Prescott's was TU for Tuxedo.

Finally, the party lines were discontinued and just about everyone had a telephone. Pay phones were placed at strategic places for the convenience of the public. A phone call at a pay phone cost a dime unless it was long distance. Telephone booths were found in cities to give more privacy.

Advancements continued. Soon we had touch tone phones, cordless phones, and finally mobile phones. I bought a bag phone from Radio Shack in 1995. It was about the size of a ladies' purse and had to be plugged into the cigarette lighter. Mobile phones (cell phones) kept getting smaller and more advanced. Today, it is estimated that there are about 293 million cell phones in the United States servicing 93 percent of the population. We have "smart phones" that have cameras and can do just about anything. Everywhere we go, we see people busy checking their phones for text messages. It seems that now people prefer to send a text message to friends rather than actually talking to them. What will be the next advancement for telephones? We'll soon find out! I wonder what Alexander Graham Bell would say if he could see us now.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

COLLEGE DAYS

I was the first in my family who was able to go to college. There were three colleges within 40 miles of our home – Henderson State Teacher’s College and Ouachita Baptist College at Arkadelphia and Southern State College at Magnolia. Unlike many young people today, I had no desire to go off to some well-known school a long way from home. I chose Southern State because my high school counselor recommended it, and in the fall of 1961, I packed my bags and my parents took me to Magnolia to begin a new chapter of my life.

I grew up on a farm and had never been away from home. At that time, Magnolia seemed to be a long way from home even though it was only about forty miles. At that time the school had a policy of requiring incoming freshmen students to remain on campus for the first three weeks during freshman orientation. Probably the main reason was to get students used to the idea of being away from home. I have to admit I got a little homesick during those three weeks.

My parents were not rich by any means and paying for my college education was an extra expense for them. I worked in the summers and had a part-time job on campus to help pay my way. One year I had the job writing parking tickets on campus which was not a bad job. Another job I had was to collect and count the money from all the vending machines on campus. Both of those jobs paid fifty cents per hour. Remember, this was in 1961 when common laborers made about a dollar an hour.

I stayed in McCrary Hall, one of the cheapest dormitories on campus to save money. Living in a dormitory was also a new experience for me. It was very crowded at first. Due to the large numbers of students, three students were assigned to each room. Three strangers living together in the same room required some adjustments. One might like to stay up late when the others wanted to sleep. I don’t remember having too many problems, but I was glad when some students dropped out and we were able to have only two people to a room.

The rooms in McCrary Hall were nothing fancy at all. The beds were metal cots and we each had a small dresser. There was a closet, a desk, and some chairs. There was a radiator which heated the room. There was no air conditioning. Room and board cost about \$60 per month. That sounds cheap today, but in 1961, even that amount was a significant expense. McCrary Hall was the second largest men’s dorm on campus housing 106 students at normal capacity. There were only about six or seven dorms when I started, but some new ones were under construction.

There was a lavatory on each floor where we could shave and brush our teeth. The showers were in the basement, so when we wanted to take a shower, we had to gather up our soap, washcloth, towel, and clean clothes and make the trip down to the shower room. There was no privacy at all—just an open room with six or eight showers and a bench on one side. The toilets were in another room in the basement. No privacy there either—several commodes in a row when no partition between them. The TV room was also in the basement which was a popular place. The only problem was everyone had to agree on which show to watch.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

I went home most weekends. My parents allowed me to drive the family car (a 1946 Buick) back and forth to school with the condition that I leave it parked during the week. I took my dirty clothes home each weekend, so that eliminated the problem of having to do laundry on campus.

After about a month or two, the number of students dwindled as some decided college was not for them and dropped out. I ended up with a roommate from El Dorado and we managed to get a room near the front door of the dorm. This particular room was larger than the others. The worst thing about it was it was near the stairway, so we could hear students going up and down the stairs, sometimes late at night. We kept this same room for the rest of the time we were in college.

Each dorm had an older person who was the dorm supervisor. We called him “the dorm daddy”. Every so often he would inspect our rooms to make sure we hadn’t demolished or damaged any of the furniture. We had to pay for any obvious damages.

As I said, McCrary Hall was one of the cheapest dorms. We sometimes called it Roach Hall, although I don’t remember seeing any roaches. I remember one guy who answered the phone in the lobby saying to the caller –“Roach Hall, head roach speaking”. McCrary Hall was used as a dorm until 1971. It was later torn down and part of the space was used for a parking lot.



McCrary Hall -- 1962

I didn’t really know what I wanted to do with my life, so I started out taking the general courses that were required for all students. I soon found out that college was different from high school. Courses were taught by what I considered to be good teachers for the most part. They taught the subject matter without trying to indoctrinate the students into their political viewpoint. Some were stricter than others. I remember a few who used teaching methods that were a bit unusual. One professor I had told us at the beginning of the course not to bring our textbook to class. He said that was us to use at home. We listened to him in class while taking notes. We never had a test during that course until the final exam and it consisted of only one question. I’ll never forget that question—Trace the development of the United States constitution from the landing of the Pilgrims to the present time. I spent two hours writing my answer to that question.

Textbooks were very expensive. It seemed that each professor preferred one particular book and the college bookstore priced them like they were gold-plated. In some cases, we could buy a used

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

textbook for some courses and sometimes we could sell our books back to the bookstore at the end of the course. I still have several of my old college textbooks which I rarely open.

I ate meals at the college cafeteria and I thought the food was pretty good. It wasn't like Mama made but was not too bad for cafeteria food. I sometimes bought a soft drink or snack from a vending machine to supplement my diet.

There were the usual college pranks involving some students, but I was one of the good boys. I remember once when a bunch of us were watching TV in the TV room. One of the guys stretched out on a bench and went to sleep. Some of the boys picked up the bench with him on it asleep and carried him outside the dorm and left him asleep out on the lawn. He didn't wake up during the move. I'm sure he was surprised when he woke up outside.

For about two years, I had the job of collecting money out of all the vending machines on campus and keeping records for each machine. I had a different money bag for each machine, so I had to walk over the campus carrying a stack of money bags full of money. I wouldn't feel too safe doing that today. Collecting money from the girl's dorms was a little different. I had to call out "Man in the hall" before entering the hallway where the vending machines were located. During the time I did that job, I collected, counted, and rolled over \$30,000 in coins.

The four years I spent in college went by pretty fast. I went through all the hazing rituals of freshman initiation, got plenty of exercise walking all over campus to classes, and probably learned a few things along the way. I was there that November day in 1963 when word reached us in class that President Kennedy had been assassinated.

The school has changed a lot since I was there. Many new buildings have been constructed and some of the older ones have been torn down. The name was changed from Southern State College to Southern Arkansas University. It is today one of the fastest growing universities in Arkansas with an enrollment of almost 5,000 students.

I still get a magazine from the university every so often that is mailed out to former students. In the back is a section telling what former students are doing. It is grouped by decades such as 1980-1989, etc. The listing for 1960-69 is getting smaller with each issue and that lets me know that I am getting old. Time marches on and each year a new crop of students fill the classrooms and dormitories of Southern Arkansas University. It pleases me to know that one of my former high school students is now a professor there.

DON'T COUNT YOUR CHICKENS BEFORE THEY HATCH

This was the front-page headline and accompanying article in The Daily Picayune in February, 1921. Following the discovery of oil at El Dorado, there was a mad rush to drill wells in other places including Nevada County. Oil was discovered at Waterloo and other test wells were drilled around the county. The one at Bluff City evidently resulted in oil being found, but evidently, it was not enough to be profitable because the well was never put into production.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE



Messrs. Jno. L. and G. H. Henry of Bluff City, are in town today and bring the report that the well at Bluff City is showing oil. John Moore who is overseeing the drilling, and testing of the well, declares, according to the Henry brothers, that the oil bailed out of the Bluff City well is apparently of the same grade found at El Dorado.

The Henry brothers declare they saw the oil as it came from the well, and that it is momentarily expected to strike a wonderful gusher.

The well is down 2,000 feet and will go deeper — the work being carried on rapidly and carefully.

From the showing at hand now, it is practically settled that Nevada county has oil, and the development of the well at Bluff City, at Sutton, and at Bodcaw, will be hurried by those in charge of the drilling.

It is believed by residents of Bluff City, that the well there will prove the biggest surprise since the Busey well first broke the stillness of El Dorado.

Again we say, "let her spout."

RAINFALL FOR MAY - 12.6 INCHES --- TOTAL FOR YEAR = 41 INCHES

AN OLD LETTER

The following letter from J. M. Hamric was published in the 8-31-1916 issue of The Nevada County Picayune. According to the explanation that accompanied the letter, Mr. Hamric was serving in the Civil War when he became ill and was in the hospital at the time this letter was written. This was the last letter to his wife. He died soon after the letter was written.

Background: J. M. Hamric came from Mississippi and settled near Laneburg. Drewry L. Fore came from Kentucky in 1849 and also settled near Laneburg. The two men were neighbors and belonged to the Masonic order at Mt. Moriah. When the Civil War broke out, they both volunteered and went to war together and served in the same company until Mr. Hamric was taken ill and sent to the hospital in Okolona, Mississippi where he was when he wrote this letter to his wife.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

*Okolona, Miss
Apr. 31, 1862*

*My own dear wife,
I embrace this opportunity of writing you this pleasant Sunday morning to inform you that I am still in the land of the living.*

I have experienced hard times since I saw you. I have been sick a great portion of my time, but thank God, I am now on the mend.

I am here at the hospital but I do not know how long I shall stay here. If my health gets better, I will go back to my regiment. My dear wife, I have not had a letter from you since the 21st of April last and you do not imagine how anxious I am to hear from you, but I don't censure you, for I believe you have written me but I have failed to get the letters. I can't say which way the army will go this fall, but I believe the army will go north through justice, and if I can but just have my health, I do not fear but I shall behold all your faces again.

E. P. Sandefer is here with me and is doing well. When you write me direct your letters to Tupelo, Miss, Company C, 20th regiment of Arkansas volunteers, Campbell brigade. I have nothing of importance to communicate. There is no chance of getting a furlough. I would be glad to get one and pay you a visit, but God only knows when I will have the privilege of seeing you.

We learn that the crops have been cut short. I'm so afraid that you will suffer for bread. God only knows what will become of us all. You must do the very best you can. Take care of everything in the best way you can, and by all means, learn to save everything. I have plenty of clothes. Try and clothe yourself and the children in the best way you can. You must learn to be your own manager. God only knows when this awful war will end. There has been a great deal of sickness in camp, but the health is getting much better now. My dear wife, let me once more request you to pray for me, for I believe you are a Christian and that your prayers will avail, and my dear wife, I promise you that I will not forget my God.

You must give my love to all inquiring friends and you may rest assured that I will see your dear faces again. Now may the blessing of heaven in full rest and remain on you, and may your prayers be heard in behalf of those friends that love you more than life.

Goodbye my dear wife, kiss all the children for me, and think of your devoted husband.

J. H. Hamric

As stated above, Mr. Hamric died shortly after writing this letter. The wife of his friend, Drewry Fore, died while he was serving in the war. After the war ended, Mr. Fore returned home to Laneburg and married the widow of his long-time friend, J. M. Hamric, in 1866.

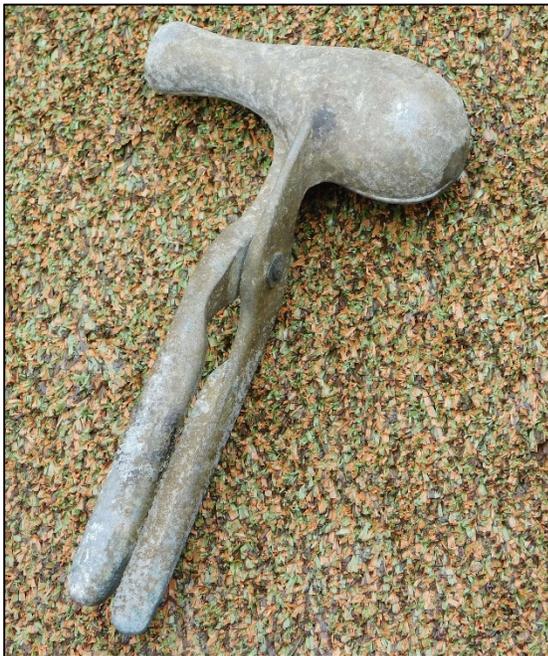
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE



What would be your caption for this photo? Choose either the boy or the dog for your caption. Send me your caption for the next issue.

What is the boy saying?

What is the dog thinking?



WHAT IS IT?

A friend of mine showed me this object a few days ago and wondered what it was. Several people looked at it and came up with several different answers of what it might be, but nobody came up with the correct answer. It is about eight inches long.

Send me your answer (or guess) and in the next issue I'll tell you what it is.