

**SAWMILLS**

The timber industry has always been an important part of the economy in South Arkansas. I can only imagine how things looked when our ancestors first arrived. Most of them were interested in having land for farming and much of the land was covered in timber. They picked out areas that were suitable for growing crops and begin to remove any standing timber that was growing there. That was quite a job in those days with the primitive equipment they had.

The two main occupations in the rural areas were farming and sawmilling. Cotton was the main money crop, but farmers also grew corn and oats for the animals, sorghum for making syrup, and vegetables to feed the family. They also grew peanuts, popcorn, and watermelons which were considered treats in those days when trips to town were few and far between. Most farms had an orchard to provide fruit supplemented by blackberries, muscadines, wild plums, and persimmons found growing wild.

**GROUND HOG SAWMILLS**

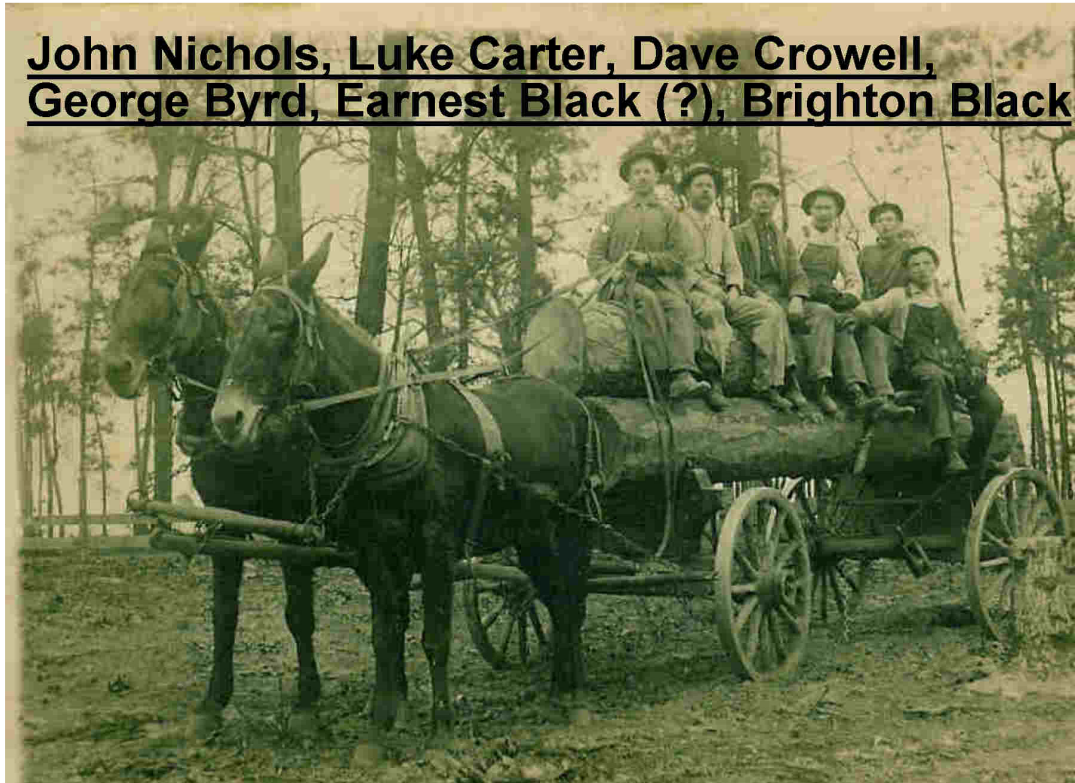
There were some large sawmills around, but the most common type in the rural areas were small mills called ground hog mills. In some areas, they were called doodlebug mills, jerkwater mills, or peckerwood mills. These small mills could be dismantled and moved in two or three days to get closer to the timber to be cut. A tract of forty acres of timber was enough to warrant moving the mill. It might take six months to a year to cut forty acres of timber in those days. A typical mill had four or five men working at the mill, a couple of teams hauling logs, and two saws cutting the logs. The cutting was done by two men using a cross-cut saw. These little ground hog mills were run by steam engines and later gasoline engines. Sometimes, automobile engines were used to run the mill. I have read that Buick and Cadillac engines were best suited to run a sawmill. Short spur railroad lines (trams) were sometimes constructed off the main railroad line to access large areas of timber.



**A TWO-MAN CROSS-CUT SAW.**

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The logs were hauled by teams of horses or mules pulling wagons loaded with a few logs. You can see why it took so long to cut forty acres of timber using this type of equipment.



### COMMUNITY SAWMILLS

By the late 1800s, most of the smaller communities had one or two sawmills which produced lumber. Some of them had a grist mill in conjunction with the sawmill where people could get their corn ground into corn meal. These mills employed several men and were the principal industry in these small communities. Some communities were

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even named after the person who established the mill in that community such as Barham on the railroad near Chidester and a community called Bright near Lamartine. Sawmills often changed ownership which meant the name of the mill was changed. Here are just a few of the sawmills mentioned in the local news columns in Nevada County.

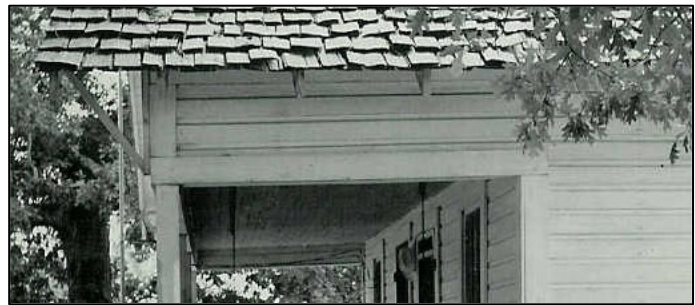
Bluff City – J. W. Dill (1918-1970s); 2 mills not named (1907)  
Bodcaw – Munn & Brockman (1886-1891; C. H. Jones (1917)  
Boughton – H. R. Clarke (1886); H. M. Basham (1886); Henry Barham (1886); J. C. Byrd (1887); I. H. Wilson (1888); Marshal & Haltom (1889); Graham & Graham (1889)  
Caney -- George W. Mendenhall (1887); Jones, Smith & Co. (1891)  
Carouse – Mr. Brower (1889)  
Glenville – J. W. Blake (1910)  
Harmony – Mr. Wilson (1891)  
Laneburg – Munn & Hudson (1885)  
Morris – Arthur Fletcher & W. C. Wicker (1907)  
Mt. Moriah – Munn’s Saw & Grist mill (1865); new mill (1914); Brice Barham/Tom Williams (1916); new mill (1921)  
Piney Grove – Jones & Frisby (1884)  
Redland – Leroy McKelvy (1950s)  
Smash Up – R. H. Delaney (1916); J. W. Bevill (1916); Houston Delaney (1950s)

### **SHINGLE MILLS**

Some mills specialized in making certain products. An example was the shingle mill which manufactured wooden shingles for roofing houses. When I was growing up, many of the older homes had cypress shingle roofs. These were short thin boards approximately eighteen inches long and overlapped to cover the roof. These type roofs were also used on the out-buildings and lasted for many years.



Laura Kirk home in Bluff City



Orland McKelvy home at Rocky Hill

### **STAVE BOLTS**

The word “bolt” in this case refers to a short section of a log (approximately 39 inches long) from which staves were made. The wooden staves were used in making wooden barrels. This was common around 1900. Oak was the main species of trees used for making staves. The local news reporter from Bluff City reported in 1910 that “Arkadelphia



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Milling Co. is doing a good bolt business in this settlement and putting lot of money into circulation. Bluff City looks like a regular bolt yard”.

## HANDLE MILLS

Another specialized mill made handles for various tools like axes, hoes, shovels, cant hooks, etc. Rather than buy a new tool when a handle broke, a new handle could be purchased. Hickory was the species of wood most often used to make handles and good quality hickory trees brought a good price.

## SPOKE MILL



The only spoke mill I know about in our area was located at Dill’s Mill, a few miles southwest of Bluff City. It was reported in 1918 that Mr. J. W. Dill had opened a spoke factory. He had an order from the U. S. government, but was having trouble finding enough men to work. This mill produced wooden spokes used in wheels for vehicles before metal wheel rims were used. You can find photos of old vehicles with wooden spoke wheels. One of my cousins told me she had a spoke made at Dill’s Mill that she used for a

potato masher. Here is a picture taken at Dill’s Mill showing what I believe to be stacks of wood used to make these wooden spokes.

Dill’s Mill, also called Caney Creek mill, was a major landmark in our area for many years. it was quite a large operation which employed several men from the community. It was located on the Reader Railroad line which provided a way for the lumber to be shipped from the mill.

## FLOORING MILLS

A few mills produced hardwood flooring. When our home was being built in the mid-1950s, hardwood flooring was used throughout the home. I think it was purchased at a mill located at Beirne in Clark County. I can remember helping to install the short hardwood boards when I was a young boy. It was time-consuming work, but resulted in a beautiful floor as long as it was maintained properly.

## MAJOR SAWMILLS

The large sawmills were usually located in the larger towns which had a railroad so the lumber produced could be easily shipped to other parts of the country. An example would be the Ozan mill at Prescott. Gurdon Lumber Co. at Gurdon, Chidester Lumber Co. at Chidester. Barringer Lumber Co. at Whelen Springs, and numerous others. Some mills

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primarily used pine timber while others used hardwood timber. Some mills produced hardwood flooring for houses.

Most of these larger mills were later purchased by large timber companies like Potlatch, Deltic, Georgia-Pacific, and International Paper Co. Some mills were expanded and are now the major industry in some of the towns in our area. Some specialize in producing lumber, while others produce plywood, OSB boards, and other products which are in demand at the time. Ownership of these mills sometimes is changed as companies buy and sell their facilities to meet their goals. For example, the big mill at Gurdon, now owned by Georgia-Pacific, was purchased from International Paper Co. who had purchased it from Arkla Chemical Co. Some companies owned many acres of timberland to supply wood for their mills and also bought timber from private landowners. I was fortunate in 1974 when International Paper Co. decided to purchase 145,000 acres of timberland from Gurdon Lumber Co. I was hired that year to help manage their timberland and spent the next 31 plus years working for that company. About the time I retired, the company decided to close their paper mill at Camden and no longer needed all the timberland. Most of that land is now owned by other companies or investment groups such as insurance companies. The ownership may change, but the land remains and the timber keeps growing.

Sawmills must adjust to the changing times and produce whatever products the consumers want –everything from basic lumber in all sizes and lengths, 4 x 8 sheets of plywood and OSB in different thicknesses, pressure-treated lumber for outdoor projects, landscape timbers, railroad ties, and many other specialized products. It all starts with harvested timber and our part of Arkansas has an abundance of that natural resource.

People often complain about the large timber companies clear-cutting so much timber. It looks bad for a year or two, but new trees are planted and soon a new forest is growing to supply the demand. You must think of growing timber the same way as growing a crop like corn or soybeans. It just takes a lot longer for the crop to mature before it's ready for harvest. Trees get old just like people, and if left alone, many will begin to rot, be attacked by insects, be hit by lightning, or become diseased. Most sawmills in our area now mainly use smaller pine trees than in the past because so much of the timber available is from pine plantations that were planted after the older timber was harvested. It takes about 30 years to grow a pine tree from a seedling to maturity and they need to be thinned at least twice at about age 15 and 20. When mature, the crop is harvested and the process starts all over again. Hardwood trees like oaks do not grow as fast as pine, but some of the softer hardwoods like sweet gum grow much faster.

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### **RAINFALL RECORD**

January (7.5 inches); February (7.7 inches); March (7.8 inches); April (10.4 inches); May (5.3 inches); June (7.3 inches). That's 46 inches for the first half of the year. Our normal annual rainfall is 52 inches. Looks like 2020 is going to be another very wet year if this trend continues.

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## WHAT IS IT?

Made from cast iron. Many homes had one of these in the old days.

Send me your answers.

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## YEGG MAN ARRESTED AT PRESCOTT

When I saw this headline in the Prescott Daily News from 1912, I immediately wondered what a Yegg man was. This term was popular in the early 1900s and refers to tramp thieves, hobo burglars, and safe breakers. The term is said to have been first used by the Pinkerton detective agency. Some think the name came from the surname of a man who was caught doing that type crime.

A man had arrived in Prescott from Hope, checked into a hotel and ordered a meal. He paid with postage stamps. The hotel proprietor called the police. The officers located the man and found almost \$100 in postage stamps inside his grip (suitcase). They arrested the man and put him in the city jail. They called the Hope police and discovered that he had paid for things with postage stamps at several places in Hope.

After further investigation, it was believed the man belonged to a gang from Tennessee which broke into safes in small country post offices stealing the stamps along with any money found.

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## LAGNIAPPE

I also found an item in the newspaper from 1908 saying that Camden merchants had agreed to designate Saturdays as Lagniappe Day to induce customers to shop. My curiosity was aroused and I had to look that word up in the dictionary to see what it meant.

It means to give a small gift or extra measure to customers who purchase something such as a bakery giving an extra doughnut when you buy a dozen doughnuts.

The word is of Creole-French origin and is pronounced (lan-yap') or (lan'-yap).

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## THE COVID-19 BLUES

By Jerry McKelvy

The virus started in China  
At a place called Wuhan  
Airplane travel helped it spread  
All across China and beyond

Soon it reached our country  
The first hot spot was New York City  
Millions of people there  
Thousands getting sick. What a pity!

Experts were called in and asked  
What we could do to stop the spread  
Since there was no medicine to help  
“Stay at home” was the first thing they said.

The schools and most stores closed  
Which was not a surprise  
This could be a serious situation  
People rushed out to get needed supplies.

Hand sanitizer and disinfectants sold out  
And the people began to panic  
The news reports were very bad  
From the countries across the Atlantic.

Toilet paper and paper towels  
Disappeared from the store  
Also, meat and poultry  
Baby diapers and more.

Crowded places were closed  
Right from the start  
The people were told  
To stay six feet apart.

Families were stuck together at home  
In a voluntary quarantine  
Soon boredom set in  
And we missed our old routine

Wear a mask we were told  
To cover our mouth and nose  
Wear rubber gloves  
And wash our clothes.

Wash your hands often  
You can't do it too much  
Germs could be anywhere  
So watch what you touch.

The older people were most at risk  
So we did what we had to do  
We kept them isolated  
Because this was no ordinary flu.

Deaths were daily reported  
On the evening news  
The weeks dragged on  
We all had the Covid-19 Blues

The economy was hurting  
Products were in short supply  
Even if we had the money  
Some things we could not buy

The people needed help  
To buy food and pay the rent  
The government stepped in  
And a stimulus check was sent.

Some states had many cases  
And others had only a few  
Each state governor had to decide  
What he or she should do.

Churches had to close  
Unless the number of people was less than  
ten  
But Walmart and Lowe's could stay open  
With hundreds of people flocking in.

Hair salons and barber shops  
Were all closed down  
Our hair grew longer  
Our smile turned into a frown.

Eating out was very much missed  
Because restaurants were affected  
They switched from dine-in to carry-out  
Lest someone get infected

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Thousands of tests were given  
To check for the disease  
“It will only take a minute”  
“Be careful with that swab, please”.

Schools need to re-open  
Children need their education  
But how to open them safely  
Is the problem facing our nation.

Some states began to open back up  
With certain restrictions  
But the virus kept spreading  
Confirming the predictions.

Thousands of jobs were lost  
As our good economy ground to a halt  
It may take years to recover  
From something that was not our fault.

Some people went along as usual  
And didn't follow the rules  
Crowding together in close places  
And acting like fools

The year is half gone as I write this poem  
This virus is the worst we have seen  
I suppose people will continue to get sick  
Until they can develop a good vaccine.

The daily death reports  
Were quite depressing  
Any tidbit of good news  
Was considered a blessing.

We are hoping and praying  
For some much better news  
Because we are tired of dealing  
With the Covid-19 Blues

## Senior Citizens Day, Aug. 21

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed a proclamation declaring August 21 as National Senior Citizens Day. To celebrate, spend time with the senior citizens you know. Let them know that they are appreciated and loved. Take a senior citizen out to lunch or dinner. (Don Mathis says he is available.) ☺

## Life in the Past Lane – by Don Mathis

The other day  
on the freeway  
I saw a sign.

“License plate  
GX4-98.”  
Hey, that's mine!

Who's the president?  
These questions make  
me cross.

It just flashed by  
on my daily drive;  
I gave it no mind.

I didn't know  
I shouldn't go  
wandering off all alone.

Bigger than any sign  
that you might find  
for a missing person

Hey, wait a sec,  
I can't neglect  
a message this great!

But Alzheimer's  
is for old-timers  
who have to stay at  
home.

is the proof,  
to tell the truth,  
you're an octogenarian.

Have I read  
what I thought it said  
– or was it a mistake?

If I'm not wrong,  
I missed the 'A-Bomb,'  
I don't have memory  
loss.

Yes, turn the page;  
you're past middle-age,  
and in the final story.

“Elderly man,  
white Dodge van,”  
they're looking to find,

“Where's my  
residence?”

If you're lucky at all,  
you won't recall  
how far you fell from  
glory.