

REFLECTIONS NO. 23 (May 3, 2021)

By Jerry McKelvy

THE “POSSUM TROT” HAD STARRING ROLE IN MOVIE

I don't think I have ever seen the movie “This Property is Condemned” starring Natalie Wood and Robert Redford. Charles Bronson also had a part in the film. The movie is important for us because a steam engine belonging to the Reader Railroad (the Possum Trot Line) was used in making that movie. It was in September, 1965, when preparations were being made for Engine No. 1702 to make the long trip from Reader, Arkansas to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi for the filming of the movie.

The engine would travel over the Missouri Pacific railroad to Monroe, LA, on to Gulfport, MS over the Illinois Central railroad, and then to Bay St. Louis, MS over the Louisville and Nashville railroad. It would take about two days for the steam engine to make the trip from Reader to Gulfport.

The 1702 had just been completely overhauled at the railroad shop in Reader and would travel by special train movement. Since there was no way of servicing steam locomotives in this modern age, extra tank cars of water and fuel oil had to be brought along on the trip. A box car loaded with spare parts also went along in case of a break-down. J. K. Byrne, Chief Mechanical Officer, and Dale McBride, Master Mechanic, went along on the trip to see that the engine remained in good working order while the movie was being filmed. The engine did not make the trip under its own power, but moved under steam behind diesel locomotives for the trip to the movie location. This gave many children and young people along the route their first chance to see a real steam locomotive.

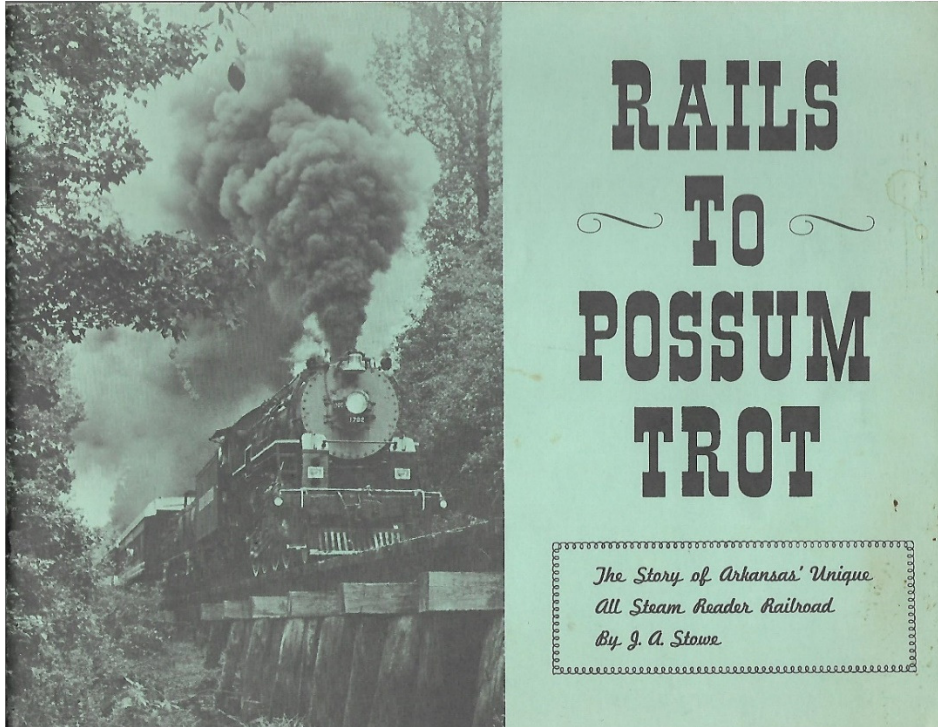
This was the movie debut for the Reader steam train, but it was used later in several other movies and TV shows including the movie “3:10 to Yuma”, the movie “Boxcar Bertha”, and the TV mini-series, “The North and the South”. It was an exciting time in the 1970s when well-known celebrities came to Ouachita and Nevada counties for the filming of some of these shows.

There are some people still around (including me) who remember riding the Possum Trot Line many years ago when it was still running trains from Reader to Waterloo. The trip to Waterloo and back took almost all day. The train stopped at Nelson's field in the Goose Ankle community where passengers could take photos of the engine producing a full head of steam. I'm glad I had the opportunity to ride the train back in the 1960s.

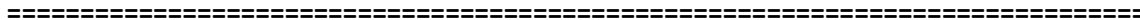
When the Possum Trot Line ceased its runs to Waterloo in the mid-1970s, I had another opportunity to ride the Possum Trot Line, but this time it was by Jeep. I was working for International Paper Co. at that time and the company worked out a deal with the owner to purchase the many railroad trestles where the railroad crossed sloughs and creeks along the route from Hwy. 24 to Dills Mill. The company planned to use the old railroad bed as a logging road to access timber in the Caney Creek bottom. My job was to count and measure each trestle. One of my co-workers had a Jeep, so the company paid him

to use his Jeep to ride down the railroad track while the rails were still in place to do this job. So, we straddled one of the rails and carefully made our way along the track for several miles. That was an interesting experience, but I must say riding the steam train was more exciting.

The tracks were taken up except for a short distance from Reader to Hwy. 24. That portion was still used as a tourist attraction for a short time.



**Logging road on the old Possum Trot route
(between Lackland Rd. crossing and Dill's Mill)**



Comments from readers—

1. One of your best articles yet. Keep up the good work!!!! – Teresa

REFLECTIONS NO. 24 (May 10, 2021)

By Jerry McKelvy

HOW NEVADA COUNTY GOT ITS NAME

Did you know that the word “Nevada” is a Spanish word which means “snow-covered”? The county in Arkansas named Nevada does get some snow most years but not nearly enough to be worthy of the description “snow-covered”.

Nevada County was created in March, 1871 along with two other new counties in Arkansas created by the state legislature. The county was formed from territory taken from Ouachita, Hempstead, and Columbia counties.

The original county seat in 1871 was at Mt. Moriah, but was moved to Rosston a few months later. It remained at Rosston until 1877 when it was moved to Prescott after a vote of the people. The railroad recently constructed through Prescott was the main reason the county seat was moved. Towns located along the railroad grew rapidly. The people living in the southern part of the new county were not happy about moving the county seat to Prescott in the extreme northern part of the county. They felt the county seat should be located near the center of the county to make it more convenient in the days when travel was by horseback or wagons.

When a new county is created, a name must be given to it. At the time the county was created, the new state of Nevada had just been admitted to the Union. Everybody was talking about the new state and the discovery of the Comstock Lode, the richest deposit of precious metals ever found in the world. Most scholars believe that the new state of Nevada had a great influence on those responsible for naming the new county in Arkansas. Others think the county was named Nevada because the shape of the county on a map was similar to the shape of the state of Nevada.

Another question is how to correctly pronounce the name of the county. The Arkansas pronunciation is Nuh-VAY-duh. The state of Nevada is correctly pronounced Nev-AD-a with the middle part rhyming with BAD. It is said the people of that state are very particular about the way the name is pronounced, especially when a politician is asking for votes and mis-pronounces it.

The state of California also named one of their counties “Nevada”. Arkansas and California are the only two states having Nevada counties.

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Comments from readers—

1. Very interesting reading, always! – Phyllis

2. This is such an interesting article, Jerry. I knew that Nevada County had been formed from parts of Ouachita and Columbia. One reason I discovered that was because my Malones, near Delta, were on the Columbia County census in 1860 and probably 1870, but were on the Nevada County census in 1880. They had not moved. Speaking of railroads, do you know if any ran near Delta right after the Civil War? My grandmother told me that her grandmother whose oldest son

Edward did not come home after the war (they never knew what happened to him), would sit on the porch in her rocking chair and wait for him to come walking down the road “when the train came through every day.” I know she waited for him, but I am not sure about the train part. Family stories, especially tragic ones, can become embellished over the years, and this was definitely a tragic event for my Malone family.-- Barbara

REFLECTIONS NO. 25 (May 17, 2021)

By Jerry McKelvy

OLD SETTLERS PICNIC IN 1915

Back in the days before county fairs, Prescott had an event in October, 1915 that was similar to a county fair. It was called the Old Settlers Picnic and the Prescott Daily News reported that an estimated 5,000 people from all parts of the county attended.

All stores in town closed from 10:30 a. m. to 1:30 p. m. and all the store windows were decorated for the occasion. The event started with a big parade. The Prescott Concert Band led the parade followed by all the students and teachers from the Prescott schools (700 in number) each carrying a small American flag. Following them was Dr. S. J. Hesterly and Hon. Thomas C. McRae riding in an automobile. Other automobiles followed them. The automobile was still a new form of transportation in 1915. Most people still traveled by wagons pulled by horses or by horseback. Thomas C. McRae was the main speaker for the occasion. He was running for governor at that time, but later withdrew from that race. He was elected governor in 1920 and served from 1921 to 1925.

There were various contests with prizes given to the winners by Prescott merchants. Here are some of the contests and the winners:

Oldest woman attending the picnic was Mrs. Bassett Bright who was 87 years old. The oldest man attending was Capt. W. R. White who was 86. The oldest married couple attending was Mr. and Mrs. T. D. Buchanan. They had been married 52 years. The couple who was the first to be married in Nevada County was Mr. and Mrs. William Carruthers. The tallest man attending was J. L. McDaniel who was just shy of 6 feet 7 inches tall. The heaviest man attending was Col. S. C. Thornton. His weight was not given. The largest family attending was the E. A. Garrett family which had 13 children.

Other contests were for the best fiddler, the smallest man over age 21, and the largest number of women and girls over the age of 10 who came to the picnic in one wagon.

Prizes were also given for the best farm produce. The prize for best corn went to John Jones, the best wheat to C. Switzer, the best oats to J. U. Brown, the largest pumpkin to B. H. Logan, and the best pears to Arthur Munn.

The crowd was said to be the largest ever in Prescott up to that time.

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A new fad was reported in Los Angeles in 1915. Women were tinting their ankles to match the color of the dress they wore.

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Comments from readers—

1. Wouldn't it have just been simpler to wear matching socks instead of painting your legs???

Amy

REFLECTIONS NO. 26 (May 24, 2021)

By Jerry McKelvy

Child Welfare Exams



In May of 1921, many Nevada county mothers took advantage of a free service from the U. S. government. A Child Welfare Truck spent two weeks in the county examining children under the age of six to see how healthy they were and to advise mothers how to properly care for infants. The above picture of the truck was published in the Prescott Daily News.

A woman doctor, Dr. Frances Sage Bradley, was in charge of the project and was assisted by a nurse, a secretary, and a mechanic who was in charge of the truck. Exams were usually conducted inside the truck, but while it was at Prescott, a room in the court house was made available for the exams. Only the mother and child were present during the exam. The truck spent one week at Prescott and the second week traveling over the county and was scheduled to visit the communities of Boughton, Laneburg, Mt. Moriah, Rosston, Bodcaw, Sutton, and Emmet. However, due to the terrible condition of the roads in Nevada County, the truck could not make it to Bodcaw, Sutton, Cale, Bluff City and other communities.

It was reported that the program was a great success. Many mothers showed up for the exams at each stop, but there was not enough time to examine all of the children. In some cases, they had to limit the exams to one child per family.

Reports from the exams were as follows:

In Prescott, a total of 117 children were examined.

Nutrition—good (94); poor (23)

Defective teeth—53

Defective bones—46

Defective glands—43

Defective skin—41

Defective throat—24

Defective eyes—8

Defective ears—6

Other defects—28

Defects per child: 19 had none; 26 had 1; 24 had 2; 19 had 3; 15 had 4; 8 had 5; 5 had 6; and 1 child had 7 defects.

The number examined in Boughton was 32, in Laneburg, 30, and in Rosston, 31 for a total of 93. Exam results were:

Defective teeth—55

Defective glands—43

Defective skin—40

Defective bones—38

Defective throat—22

Defective eyes—19

Defective ears—14

Other defects—13

The birth had been registered—45

The birth had not been registered—19

Birth registration was uncertain—29

The doctor did not treat any of the children who had physical problems, but only advised the mothers of the condition of their child. It was up to the parents to follow up with a physician to take care of any problems.

In looking at the exam reports, I am surprised that so many children under six years of age had so many health problems. I also wonder what was meant by the term “defective”. I suppose it means “not perfect”. Would a freckle be considered a skin defect? Why did so many children under age six have defective bones and teeth?

Dr. Frances Sage Bradley was one of only a few women doctors in the early 1900s. Her husband died from tuberculosis and she was left a widow with four small children to support. Three months after her husband’s death, she enrolled in medical school and her mother helped take care of the children. She was one of the first female doctors to graduate from Cornell University in 1899. In 1915, she began child welfare work for the

Children's Bureau, a division of the Department of Labor. Her passion was educating women in rural areas on how to properly care for their children. Much of her work was in the southern and western states and Appalachia where she had to deal with mountain people who didn't trust a woman doctor and overcome problems of bad or non-existent roads, bad weather, and mechanical problems with the vehicles of that time. If you want to know more about this lady, a book about her is available on amazon and other sources. The title of the book is "A Doctor for Rural America: The Reforms of Frances Sage Bradley".

The large truck known as the Child Welfare Special had to be repaired while in Nevada County due to part of the underbody of the truck being torn away due to the deplorable condition of Nevada County roads. After repairs were made, the truck continued on to Columbia County doing the same type exams.

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Comments from readers---

1. Actually, that is quite believable. Less than 15 years later, in our small community, there were children who never saw a doctor in their childhood. The mothers had no prenatal care. The fathers, when they were sober, expended very little energy to provide for the welfare of the family. The whole family was poorly nourished. The first person in the extended family to graduate from high school was a member of the third generation. This pattern of culture was wide spread to include other communities. And continued, at least, to my adulthood. Needless to say - "I got the \$755~€£# out of that neighborhood and that culture." – Mary

REFLECTIONS NO. 27 (May 31, 2021)

By Jerry McKelvy

THE 1920 OVERLAND "FOUR" – ONE TOUGH AUTOMOBILE

Dixie Motor Sales Co. opened for business in Prescott in 1918. The location was "three doors west of First State Bank and one door east of Harrell Automobile Co.". The local dealers in 1919 were L. J. and H. H. Harrell. They also sold Buick and Chevrolet vehicles. The local dealers attended a demonstration of the new 1920 Overland "Four" in Texarkana and reported that it was one tough automobile.

The dealers were told at the demonstration to "treat it rough" and to "try to tear it up" which is exactly what the Prescott dealers did when they got back to Prescott.

They took one of the vehicles loaded with passengers over a road full of pot-holes at a speed of 35 miles per hour with no problems. They also drove it up the stone steps of the Methodist church and back down with no problems.

The cars had a 100-inch wheelbase and a 27-horsepower engine and were in great demand at that time. The Overland was produced until 1926 when it was replaced by the Willys Whippet.

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A PREACHER'S FAREWELL
(from the 7-9-1931 issue of The Prescott Daily News)

A preacher had become discouraged with his work with his congregation. He was a friend of the governor and got a political job. In taking leave of his congregation he said,

“Brothers and sisters, I must say good-bye. I don’t think God loves you, because none of you ever die. I don’t think you love each other, because none of you ever get married. I don’t think you love me, because you have not paid my salary. Your donations are moldy fruit and wormy apples—and by their fruits, you shall know them. I am going to a better place. I will be a chaplain at the penitentiary—where I go, ye cannot yet come, but I go to prepare a place for you, and the good Lord have mercy on you. Good-bye.”

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We are having another wet year. Here is my rainfall record through May.

Jan.— 4.7 inches; Feb. - 7.0 inches; March – 10.3 inches; April – 6.3 inches; May – 10.5 inches. Total for the first five months of the year is 38.8 inches. We also had about 15 inches of snow in February.

Gardeners are having a hard time getting their gardens going this year due to the rain and cool temperatures.

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Comments from readers—

1. Even I remember the 'Willys Whippet' !!!...-- Duncan