

Jerry McKelvy's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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THE LESTER AND OUACHITA VALLEY RAILWAY

There once were many short-line railroads mainly constructed by large sawmills to provide access to timber to be used by their mills. One such railroad belonged to the Lester Mill Co. which had a large sawmill at Lester which was about eight miles northwest of Camden on the Gurdon-Camden branch of the Iron Mountain railroad. Lester was named for Josh Lester, a former Confederate veteran, who settled there.

The Lester Mill Co. was featured in an article in the American Lumberman magazine in June, 1906. According to that article, the Lester Mill Co. began about 1891. The president of the Lester Mill Co. in 1906 was W. W. Brown and L. Sparkman was the general manager who lived at Lester. I wonder if this might be Lemil Sparkman who established a lumber mill at what is now Sparkman in Dallas County in 1891.

The mill was quite a large operation. The article included several pictures of the facility. The company had a large general store in a building which also housed the offices for the company and a post office. There was also a large machine shop building, a foundry for making parts for the mill, warehouses for storage, and other buildings. The mill had an electric light plant which provided electricity for the mill and also to the town of Lester. Dr. B. V. Powell was the local physician who also operated a drug store.

The Lester Mill Co. also owned a railroad which extended westward from Lester for about 16 miles into Nevada County. Plans were for the railroad to be extended on to Hope, but I don't think it was ever completed that far. By 1907, it was four miles into Nevada County and surveying and grading work was being done further west. It was expected to run near Rosston and on to Hope. I have been unable to find a map showing the exact route.

It started out as a narrow-gauge railroad, but was converted into a standard-gauge railroad in 1904 that followed a slightly different route in some places. The terms narrow-gauge and standard-gauge refer to the distance between the two rails. A standard-gauge railroad has rails 4 feet, 8.5 inches apart. There were two logging camps along the railroad. A steam log loader was used to load logs on to the rail

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

The mill owned three locomotives which were used to bring logs to the mill over this railroad. Locomotive No. 1 was actually built at Lester by a man named George Farmsworth who was superintendent of the machine shop. Except for a few parts, the metal used to build the locomotive was made at the mill foundry at Lester. The foundry also made parts for repairs for other sawmills in the area.

The mill company owned about 12,000 acres of land including a coal mine near Lester. This coal was actually lignite which had different qualities from most lignite in the area. It was said to be brown in color but turned black when exposed to the air. The coal was used as fuel for the three locomotives the mill owned. According to the article, when the railroad converted to standard-gauge a different coal mine was used for fuel. The first mine was abandoned but timbers were left intact. The land around Lester also contained a clay called Koalin clay which was determined to be useful in making pottery and brick. An extensive coal and clay mining operation known as Maximo was developed just northwest of Lester

In 1906 when the magazine article was written, this coal was being analyzed for other possible uses. It was said that oil from the coal had some medicinal properties and was good for rheumatism, certain eye diseases, and skin conditions. It was also being studied as a possible insecticide used to kill insects that damage timber and fruit trees. Some remnants from the mining operation can still be seen. International Paper Co. owned part of this land when I was working for them. We set aside an area around these ruins to be protected as part of the company's Special Places in the Forest program.

There was much excitement in Nevada County as the Lester and Ouachita Valley railroad was being constructed toward Hope. Here are some comments found in the local newspaper:

Friendship local news (March 24, 1906)—We are glad the Ouachita Valley railroad from Lester is coming on rapidly through our county. We hope it may soon be completed to Hope.
Friendship local news (April 25, 1906)—We are glad to learn the railroad from Lester to Hope is coming on rapidly. We wish them good luck for we do need a road through the center of this county.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Cale local news (June, 1906) – A considerable amount of lumber is being hauled from the Westmoreland mill at Cale to a point on the Lester and Ouachita Valley railroad to be shipped to distant places.

Friendship local news (June 29, 1906)—Joe Gillespie is in our community this week surveying for the Lester Mill Co.

(Friendship local news (June 19, 1907)—The Cale Mill Co. is hauling lumber to the Lester railroad.

(An article in 1907 about changes in Nevada County) --- The Lester Lumber Co. railroad has reached four miles into Nevada County headed for Hope. Trains are running a short distance from Hatley's Store. (Note: Hatley's Store was in Jackson Township near the old Carolina church)

The city of Prescott contacted the Lester Mill Co. in 1908 encouraging them to bring the railroad to Prescott. The mill company responded by saying the railroad was about 15 or 16 miles from Prescott and that Hope was the preferred destination.

Just as things were going good for the Lester Mill Co., disaster hit. The mill burned in 1910. An article in the Daily Graphic, a Pine Bluff newspaper in 1913, said the 12,000 acres owned by the Lester Mill Co. had been sold to the Arkansas Colonization Co. for \$10 per acre. This sale included the town of Lester. This company was in the business of buying cut-over timber land and selling land to people who might want to live in the area. An office was set up at Lester to handle immigrants and buyers coming to the area. The company advertised factories would soon be constructed for the manufacture of coal and clay products which would provide jobs. A great development in that part of the county was expected.

Another article in the same Pine Bluff paper in 1913 says the Frisco railroad had purchased a log road running from Lester, a small town on the Iron Mountain railroad eight miles north of Camden to within a few miles of Hope. It was thought that Frisco might complete construction to Hope so that trains could run from Hope to Camden. As far as I know, the railroad was never completed into Hope. Evidently, the Lester and Ouachita Valley railroad was abandoned after the mill burned and the land was sold.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Today, there is no evidence of this large sawmill at Lester. The road through that area is still known as Lester Road. There is a small building at Lester which has an interesting display of antiques from the old days.



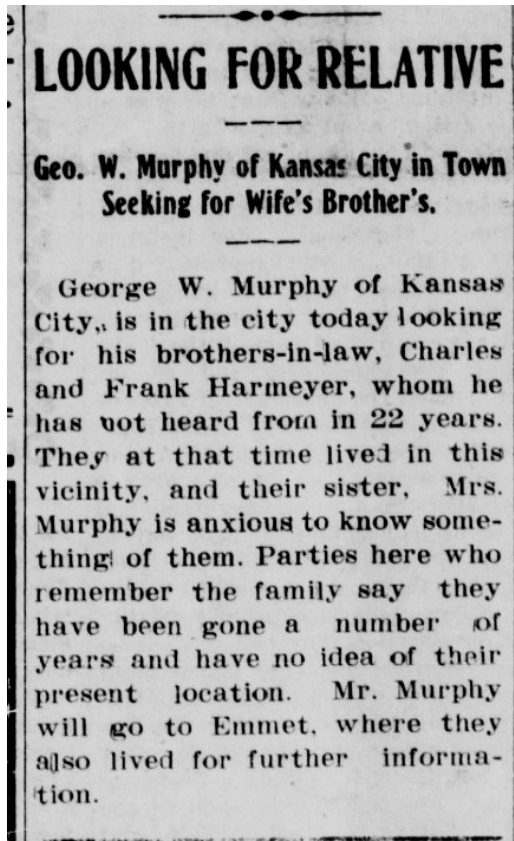
WORD OF THE MONTH

The word for this month is **SCANTLING**—

From Prescott Daily News (Dec. 28, 1908) – Lusius Moore (or Monroe) became involved in a quarrel with Albert Johnson, his neighbor, at Springhill in Hempstead County and struck him on the head with a heavy scantling, killing him instantly. Johnson was a widower and was 28 years old. Monroe was 18 years old and was single.

A scantling is a short piece of lumber used in home construction such as a 2 x 4 stud or rafter.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE



LOST RELATIVE

This article was in the Prescott Daily News back in 1908. Sometimes, family members just disappeared without letting their relatives know where they were. I sent this clipping to a friend, Yvonne Munn, and she did a little research on this family. She says, "They were born in Indiana. Charles was born in 1849 and died in 1888 in Hempstead County, Arkansas. I haven't found where he is buried yet. Frank was born in 1868 and died in 1929 and is buried in Oklahoma. I found his grave on Find a Grave. Amelia was born in 1866 and married George Murphy who was born in 1869 and died in 1935. The parents were Henry and Louisa Harmeyer. I found an 1870 census in Indiana. There were some more children listed besides Frank, Charles, and Amelia. George and Amelia Murphy are buried in Maple Hill Cem. In Kansas City, Kansas. I just wonder if George Murphy ever found Frank. It is amazing what information you can find nowadays."

Mrs. Murphy was unaware in 1908 that her brother, Charles Harmeyer, had died in 1888 in Hempstead County.

FUNNY BOOKS

They are actually called comic books, but when I was a young boy about ten years old, we called them funny books. I had a pretty big collection and was always excited to get a new issue.

I liked all kinds of comic books, but I had my favorites. I liked those with western characters like Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, The Lone Ranger, Lash LaRue, and others. I also liked the super heroes like Superman, Superboy, Wonder Woman, Batman, The Green Hornet, and others. I could entertain myself for quite a while just by reading a comic book.

I even liked other type comic books like Bugs Bunny, Elmer Fudd, Porky Pig, Donald Duck, The Roadrunner, Dennis the Menace, Dagwood and Blondie, and Archie and Jughead. There were plenty of comic books from which to choose in those days. Most comic books in the 1950s only cost ten cents and usually had about 64 pages. Instead of raising the price, publishers began to reduce the number of pages while keeping the price the same. Prices gradually increased during the 1960s. It was not a great expense to purchase a new comic book. I suppose my parents might have thought the expense

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

was worth it because it would keep me entertained while they were busy doing other things.

I wish now I had kept all my old comic books. Many people collect them and some issues have become valuable over the years if they are in good shape. Mine were probably worn out from being well-used.

TV came along and as I got older, I tended to watch television instead of reading comic books. Some of the same characters were on TV.

Since most newspapers have stopped their print editions, I don't see too many comic strips these days. I still glance through the Sunday comic section when I get hold of a Sunday newspaper. I loved The Far Side cartoons while they existed and I guess my favorite comic today is one called Pickles. It features an older retired couple and since I am an old retired man, or what some might call "an old geezer", I can appreciate some of the situations portrayed in that comic strip. Just about every day, I do a search on the internet for "Pickles cartoon" and it brings up a daily comic strip so I can see what Earl and Opal are doing.

The Bible says in Proverbs that a merry heart doeth good like a medicine, so I think getting a chuckle from a comic strip might be a good thing. It can relieve stress for a few minutes and bring a smile to your face. Anything that can do that can't be all bad.

HE TRIED TO REPAY HIS DEBT

This little story appeared in the Prescott Daily News in 1909.

A man was visiting Hot Springs as a tourist in 1899. During his visit, he decided to climb the wooden observation tower as many tourists did, but he lacked 25 cents having the correct change to pay Mr. Enoch Woolman, the tower operator. He was allowed to climb the tower and he promised to return the next day to pay the 25 cents. That afternoon, he received an urgent message from home and had to leave at once. He was not able to return to Hot Springs until twenty years later in 1909.

He attempted then to locate Mr. Woolman to repay his debt, but learned that Mr. Woolman had been dead for several years. He then tried to find some of his family, but learned that one of Mr. Woolman's sons lived in Maine and the other son lived in Montana. The man said he would continue searching and if he could locate one of the sons, he would repay his 25-cent debt with compound interest for 20 years.

RAINFALL RECORD

Rainfall for May was 6.2 inches. Total January through May was 26 inches.

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Don Mathis has contributed two poems this month for us to enjoy.

July 15 is National I Love Horses Day, a good day to horse around! July 1 is International Joke Day, a time for unbridled merriment! What could be better than celebrating July with a good horse laugh!

Why the Long Face? – by Don Mathis

The sadness in the horse's eye
seemed a bit displaced.
She seemed she was about to cry.
So, I asked, "Hay, Why the long face?"

"I fell down in the mud," she said,
"and I could not Giddy Up."
I thought of some horseplay I read
of a perfidious politician in a murky rut.

But this was not the 'Old Gray Mayor,'
the butt of a dirty joke.
This horse had dappled hair
and she looked at me and spoke,

"The vet couldn't make a horse call
and I didn't want to stirrup stress.
And whinny said he had to stall,
my tail of whoa became a mess.

"Medics thought I was foaling 'round,
that I was barn with low horsepower.
But my neigh-bor who lives uptown
said he could help in 'bout an hour.

"They took me to the horse-pital.
They thought I was lame.
The doctor fixed me up a little
from my tail up to my mane.

"I had to pony up some hay.
How sad for a thoroughbred!
I offered credit, but they said nay,
they only would take bread.

"I felt like a colt had run its course
on my neigh-kid neck.
Although I was just a little hoarse,

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

it cost my whole paycheck.”

I felt so sorry for this horse,
her cure was an imposition.
But she said it could be worse;
she's listed in stable condition.

July 24 is National Tequila Day in the United States. Celebrate with a drink of the national beverage of Mexico! Raise a glass, raise a toast!

Tequila & Truths from Sierra Vieja -- by Don Mathis



Every day should be passed
as if it were your last.

And may the glass we know as life
hold no taste of bitterness or strife.

Never make a foe if you can make a friend.
Always take the high road until the journey's end.

Share Sierra Vieja with your amigo
and watch how fast your troubles go.

Give a toast to love, a toast to laughter,
a toast to living happily ever after.

Here's to a cool wind when it's hot,
and a warm breeze when it's not.

Here's to always giving your best shot.
Here's to the arrow hitting the dot.

Remember the words, Salud a la Vida,
as you enjoy Sierra Vieja Tequila.