

Jerry McKeelvy's
WAY BACK WHEN
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Email ---- sandman43@att.net
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SIDE-SADDLES FOR WOMEN

You may have seen pictures or movies showing women riding on a horse side-ways with both legs on the left side of the horse. It is said that side-saddles were first used in 1382 when Princess Anne of Bohemia rode a horse that way on her way to marry King Richard II. For the next few hundred years, that was considered the proper way for a woman to ride a horse.

Women in those days wore long dresses that made it impractical to ride astride a horse and it was also considered unbecoming for a lady to ride a horse like a man. Riding a horse while wearing a long dress was also very dangerous if the horse happened to fall down. The clothing could get caught in the stirrup and result in a lady being dragged by the horse.

Over the years, many improvements were made in the side-saddle to make it more comfortable and safer. A foot rest was added so that the woman's feet could rest on it while riding, but still it was somewhat uncomfortable to ride a horse that way.

In this country, the side-saddle was used most often in the southern states. By the early 1900s, customs were changing and some women began to ride astride a horse like a man. Some women felt being forced to ride side-saddle was a symbol of oppression by the males. This was aided by the suffragette movement when women were demanding the right to vote and equal rights with men.

This was not without controversy, especially in the South. At a reunion of Confederate veterans in Little Rock in 1911, some young women rode in a parade sitting astride their horses. A similar parade was scheduled in Nashville, Tennessee and those in charge put out this announcement—"No woman shall appear in the parade astraddle and should any so appear, the officers in charge shall politely request that they retire".

In a newspaper article from Philadelphia in 1911 was this notice—"A woman astride

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a horse is not graceful. If a woman would ride astride a horse, she should wear breeches. It is not permissible for anyone of the fair sex to ride astride a horse in a reunion of Confederate veterans for the reason that the old soldiers do not think it is commendable and that such riding does not typify the gracefulness and longfulness of glorious Southern womanhood”.

In another article is this statement—“We deem such female exploitation wholly unfeminine and unnatural, unseemly, indecorous, and abominably immodest and directly contrary to the proprieties as viewed by the great mass of southern people. Besides, such pose is essentially ungraceful and absolutely destructive of the beautiful picture of the symmetrical woman on horseback that we are all so familiar with, the whole aggregating a condition entirely out of harmony with the eternal fitness of things that we should always endeavor to maintain”.

The debate of how a woman should ride a horse continued for many years. In England, it was largely determined by the royal family. The women tended to follow the advice or example of the Queen or female members of the royal family. For a few years, women there changed to riding astride a horse, but in 1924, it was reported that there was a return to the side-saddle. Some women said that riding astride developed muscles not good for dancing, but a well-known riding master said riding astride gives a woman more grace and security and girls from 10 to 14 years of age were being encouraged to ride astride. So, the debate continued on the proper way for a woman to ride a horse.

According to a report on the Internet, women riding side-saddle seems to be making a comeback. Some credit the British TV series called “Downton Abbey” as the reason because women in the show rode side-saddle. That TV series is set in the early 1900s when women riding side-saddle was common.

MONOMANIA

I came across this word while reading an old newspaper article from 1875. The word monomania means a form of mental illness in which a person is obsessed with one particular thing.

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The case I was reading about happened in West Virginia in 1875. A man about 70 years old who was moderately wealthy and well-educated had always believed in witches. One day, his wife left for a visit with her family in Pennsylvania and when she returned, her husband would not let her in the house. She returned to her family in Pennsylvania leaving her husband and a six-year-old son.

While his wife was gone, the man and the young boy fired pistols at the walls, doors, furniture, and windows all throughout the house. The man had an extensive library of expensive books and he completely destroyed them because he thought witches lived between the pages.

The man had allowed his young son to have pistols also and let him shoot at whatever he wanted. One time, the boy shot into the chair where the man was sitting almost hitting him, but the boy said the witches did it and the man believed him. The boy blamed any mischief he caused on the witches.

All this shooting went on day and night, but mostly at night, and some of the bullets even hit the homes of his neighbors. The man was arrested on a charge of lunacy. He was examined by medical professionals who said he was sane in every other aspect of his life and so they released him after taking away his guns.

A few days later, the man's house caught fire and his neighbors quickly put out the fire before much damage was done. The home caught on fire several more times and his explanation for the fires was that since he had no guns, he was trying to destroy the witches with fire.

The man was so obsessed with witches that he sent a telegram to his bank telling them to not let the witches have any of his money.

The police finally arrested the man and his six-year-old son. The article didn't tell what happened to the man and boy after they were arrested.

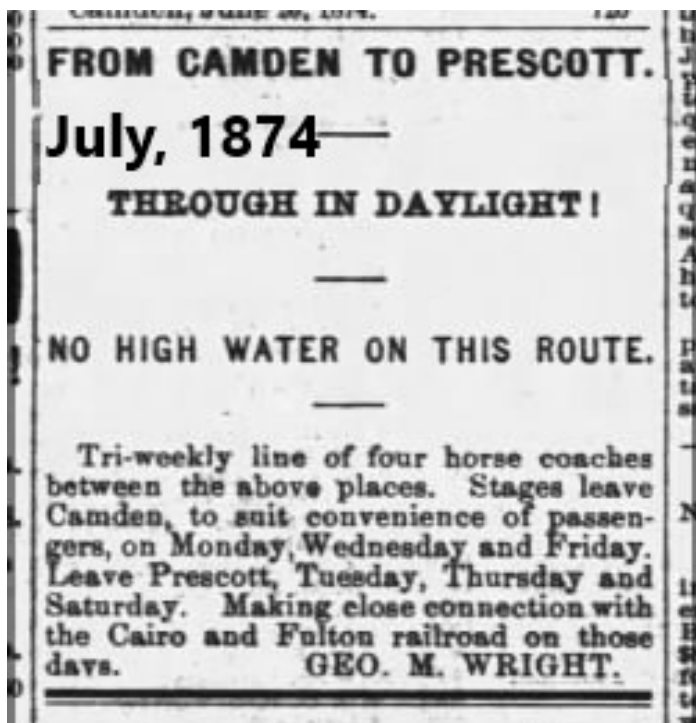
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HENS ATE DYNAMITE

Do you remember the old episode of The Andy Griffith show in which a goat ate some dynamite and they had to get the goat out of town because they were afraid the dynamite might go off?

A similar story was published in the Nevada County Picayune in 1910. This happened in Connecticut. A farmer had some dynamite sticks that had been exposed to frost. He broke the sticks apart and crumbled it up on a flat stone to dry. He planned to use it later in clearing some land.

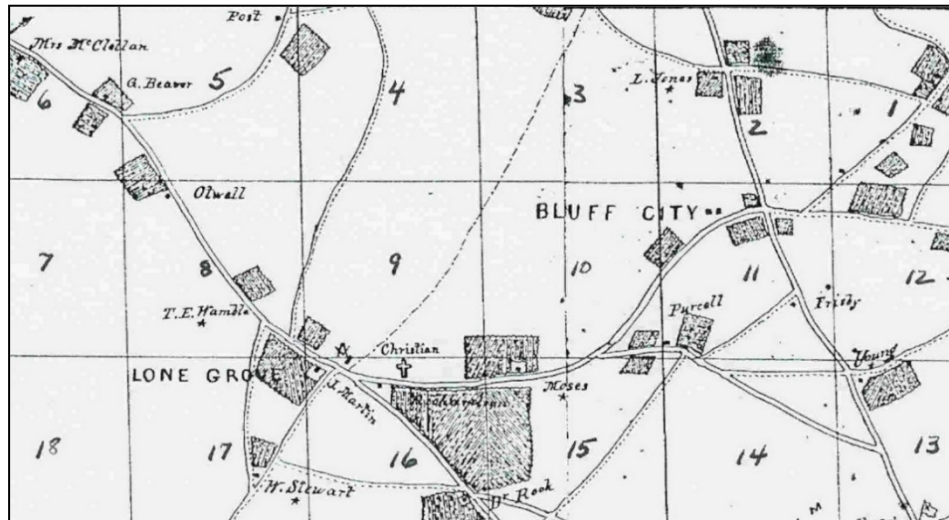
He went back to check on it and noticed his flock of chickens were scratching in the dynamite and eating it like gravel. The farmer had a problem then. He was afraid to eat eggs from the chickens. He said, "Who knows where that dynamite is now. Suppose it got in the shells." Because of this, the farmer was afraid to crack an egg. He couldn't tell by looking which hens ate the dynamite, so he said for the time being his whole flock was safe. There was no way he was taking an axe to kill a hen for his Thanksgiving dinner.



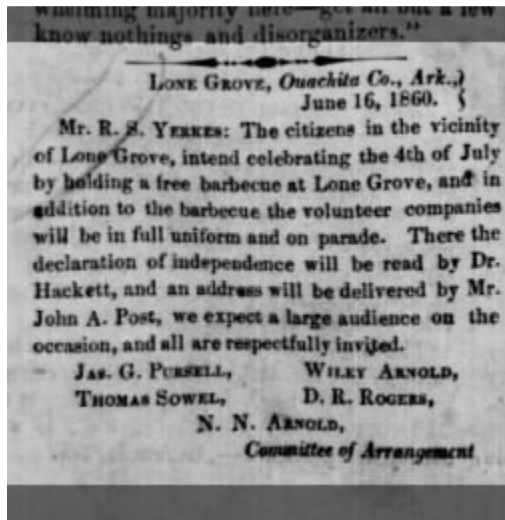
Ad for stagecoach from 1874

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A BIG EVENT AT LONE GROVE IN 1860



About four miles southwest of Bluff City was the post office and community known as Lone Grove. Those of us who grew up in this area remember it as Gum Grove. The above map is dated 1865. A post office existed at Lone Grove from 1858 until 1866. For some reason, the name was changed from Lone Grove to Gum Grove. I don't know the reason for the name change or exactly when it occurred. I know that by the early 1900s, it was known as Gum Grove. A school was located there which many of my family attended. The school was consolidated with Bluff City in 1929. The Gum Grove Church of Christ was located there until 1980.



I came across this newspaper item from the June 30, 1860 issue of the *Arkansas True Democrat* in Little Rock announcing a big Fourth of July celebration at Lone Grove. I think the "volunteer companies" mentioned were companies of the Arkansas militia. There were 62 companies of militia in Arkansas and in some counties, they had uniforms. This was sort of the forerunner of what we call The National Guard today.

I think the Dr. Hackett who read the Declaration of Independence was Dr. M. B. Hackette Jr. who is buried at Ebenezer. He died in 1861 at age 29. I don't know who John A. Post was who was the main

speaker that day.

As we pass by that location today, it is hard to believe that such an event ever took place there. I wish I could go back in time and attend this event at Lone Grove in 1860, watch the parade of men in full uniform pass by, listen to the speeches, and enjoy some free barbecue.

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I'm sure that in June, 1860, there was an awareness of the sectional differences between the North and the South and probably talk of a possible war in the near future. A few months later in April, 1861, the Civil War began and Arkansas soon joined ten other states in seceding from the Union to form the Confederate States of America.

In April, 1864, just four years after this event at Lone Grove, an actual army of over 600 Union soldiers with all their wagons and equipment passed by Lone Grove headed for Poison Springs and Camden.

National Train Day, May 13 this year, celebrates the legacy of trains and the contributions they have made to transportation, commerce, and history. Daniel Mathis was born in 1921 near the Cotton Belt tracks in Fordyce, Arkansas. His son celebrates with an onomatopoeia poem how he inherited his love of locomotives.



Train Man – by Don Mathis

A house still stands
down the street
from the switching yard.

My father was born here,
the sound of trains
heralding his birth.

Now the old man is gone,
and grass grows
between the rails.

But, can you imagine
a dozen steam engines
huffing and *puffing*,
boilers *rumble-rumbling*
ssssteam hissssing?

Can you imagine
a freight yard
for a playground
for a five-year-old kid?

Recess is signaled
by a high pitched *too-oot*.

The 12:01
gives a warning for lunch
with a *clang, clang, clang*.

The great freight
box cars from afar
bring the only change of scene
to a child
imprisoned by the pines
of southern Arkansas.