

Jerry McKeelvy's
WAY BACK WHEN
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A HANGING AT DANVILLE

Old newspapers are full of reports of major crimes. What was called one of the worst crimes in Arkansas history took place March 6, 1905 about fifteen miles southwest of Danville in Yell County. This story even made the front page of *The Nevada County Picayune*.

A man by the name of James W. Ince took an axe and split the skulls of his wife and three small children while they slept. The children ranged in age from four months to four years. The next morning, he walked twelve miles into Danville and turned himself in to the authorities. The sheriff and deputies took him back to the scene of the crime and he admitted his guilt.

There was much talk of a mob taking him from the jail and lynching him and the sheriff took him out of town a few miles until the danger was past. A special term of court was hastily called three months after the murders and a trial was held. His lawyer pleaded insanity, but the jury ruled that the man was sane at the time of the murders and he was sentenced to be hanged on May 4. His case was appealed to the Arkansas Supreme Court. While the appeal was being made, Ince tried to escape from jail two different times but was recaptured. The Supreme Court ruled that a new trial be held and more evidence presented regarding his plea of insanity.

At the second trial, Ince was again found guilty after the jury deliberated for 22 hours. His conviction was again appealed to the Arkansas Supreme Court, but this time the court affirmed the conviction. The governor then set an execution date for the hanging. Ince was moved to Little Rock for safe keeping while awaiting his execution.

The hanging took place in the jail yard at Danville. Ince was led to the scaffold, but he asked to be allowed to speak to the crowd. He spoke for an hour and ten minutes. He told the crowd that he was saved and prepared to die. He said he was under evil influence when he killed his family and did not realize what he had done. He thanked the people

WAY BACK WHEN

for hanging him saying he had rather die than spend his life in prison. He complimented the sheriff and deputies for the treatment he received while in jail. He said he loved his wife and babies and could not understand why he killed them. He asked to be buried beside them, but since his neighbors objected, he said he would be satisfied with a grave in the potter's field.

By the time his speech was over, it was almost noon. He asked for dinner and ate a hearty meal. He was then led back to the scaffold and a black hood was placed over his head. When all was ready, the sheriff pulled the trigger for the trap door and Ince plunged to his death. The body was cut down after twenty minutes and he was pronounced dead. He was buried in the corner of the pauper's field at the Danville Cemetery.

One newspaper article stated a possible motive for the killings. According to that article, Ince was having financial difficulties and could not make a decent living for his family, so he decided to kill his wife and children and then kill himself. He first killed his wife and then the children from the oldest down to the youngest. He then sharpened his knife to cut his throat, but his nerve failed him and he could not do it. He then decided to give himself up to the authorities.

Another article stated that Ince wrote his autobiography while in jail and asked a Catholic priest of Little Rock to have it published and sold after his death with the proceeds to be used to purchase a grave marker for this wife and children.

Just out of curiosity, I looked on the Find a Grave web site to see if I could find this family in the cemetery records of Yell County. I believe the wife and children are buried at Mt. Zion Cemetery at Briggsville. A small homemade concrete marker is there. On one side are the names Willie and Jimmie and on the other side is "Wife and baby". The marker also has the inscription "Family of Jim Ince" and the year 1904. The murders happened in 1905, so I think that year is a mistake on the marker. I read somewhere that the children's names were William, James, and Selma and the wife's name was Frances. The names Willie and Jimmie on the marker are the boys—William and James.

I wonder if the autobiography he wrote was ever published or what ever happened to it. This is just another tragic story from Arkansas history.

WAY BACK WHEN

GROWING CUCUMBERS

I grew up on a farm and my parents did all sorts of things to make extra money to support our family. We raised our own vegetables, milked our own cows, and slaughtered animals for meat. We had many fruit trees such as apples, peaches, pears, and figs. We picked wild blackberries and muscadines when they were in season. I don't remember ever going hungry, but we knew that we had to work to have plenty of food and the whole family pitched in to help.

Usually, in the summer, we would take our produce and "peddle" it in Camden. My dad and I would load up a big load of watermelons and cantaloupes along with several bushels of peas, beans, or whatever vegetables we had to spare. These peddling trips took about all day. Sometimes we went to the nicer sections of town and knocked on doors offering our produce for sale. Most of the time, ladies were glad to get fresh farm produce, but a few didn't want to be bothered. Sometimes we went to the poorer sections of town and just drove the streets hollering out to people sitting on the porches that we had melons for sale. Sometimes, we just sat under a shade tree and waited for the customers to come to us. This was back in the days when a large melon sold for about fifty cents and a cantaloupe might bring a dime or a quarter for a large one. We sometimes came home after a day's work with forty or fifty dollars and that was back when common laborers made \$40 per week.

My dad also cut and hauled pulpwood in those days, so there was much variety in our work including timber work, farming, raising cattle, and hauling hay. There was always some type of work that needed to be done.

Sometime around 1960, Mr. Frank Pfiefer of Chidester organized a group of farmers in our area to grow cucumbers for a pickle company. The company had a place in Chidester where farmers could bring the cucumbers to be graded according to size. Growing a large patch of cucumbers is hard work. The main work is having to bend over to pick them and that had to be done about every other day. The whole family joined in the picking. The cucumbers were put in tow sacks or baskets and transported to

WAY BACK WHEN

Chidester to be graded. The small cucumbers brought more per pound, but they didn't want those that were too large. Those would be culled.

Mr. John Stovall from Camden had purchased a farm a few miles down the road from our house just past Ebenezer Cemetery at the intersection of County Rd. 47. He and my dad were friends and they decided to farm together in the summer of 1961 and grow cucumbers. I remember spending many hours there breaking up the land with our little Farmall Cub tractor. I didn't know at the time that this land I was plowing once belonged to my great-great grandfather, Jabez McKelvy way back in the late 1850s.

All was going well that year. We had a good crop of cucumbers which kept us busy and brought in some extra income. Then the unexpected happened. It was on June 6, 1961. My mother (actually my step-mother) and Mrs. Stovall were busy picking cucumbers in a patch by the side of the road. A young boy almost eleven years old was visiting the family who lived across the road from the cucumber patch. The boy was out in the yard with a .22-caliber rifle and for some reason shot across the road. The bullet hit my mother in the hip as she was bent over picking cucumbers. At first, she thought Mrs. Stovall had hit her with a cucumber, but then she felt the pain and they realized she had been shot. She was rushed to the hospital in Prescott. Tests showed the bullet had traveled about eight inches lodging near her spinal column. The doctor said it would be too dangerous to remove the bullet since it was so near the spine. From watching so many westerns, we assumed that a bullet had to be removed, but the doctor assured us that it would cause no problems if left alone. She was soon released from the hospital and recuperated at home.

The sheriff (Horace Hale) had been called to investigate the incident. The young boy at first claimed he was shooting at a bird, but later in court, he changed his story. The prosecuting attorney filed a petition to the court stating the boy "either intentionally or because of gross carelessness and negligence shot Mrs. Ruel McKelvy in the hip with a 22-caliber rifle thereby inflicting upon the said Mrs. Ruel McKelvy a dangerous and serious wound" and that the boy was "a dependent, neglected, and delinquent child as set forth in Section 45-204 of the Arkansas Statutes". The petition requested that the court place the child on probation or that he be sent to the Boy's Industrial School "in

WAY BACK WHEN

order that he may receive the proper training, education, and necessities of life". About two weeks after the incident, the judge ordered the boy to be sent to the Boy's Industrial School and directed the sheriff to escort him to that facility.

My mother fully recovered from her wound and lived for another sixty years with the bullet lodged near her spine. She fell and broke a hip in her old age and the medical folks discovered the bullet while doing tests and we had to explain to them how that happened.

I don't remember how long cucumber growing was done in our area, but we remember all the hard work we did. We also remember the near tragedy affecting our family that year and were very thankful that it ended as well as it did. It could have been much worse.

LUNCH VISITORS

I wish I had a picture to prove it, but you will just have to take my word for it that this actually happened. As most of you know, I once worked for a timber company and my job required me to work outdoors much of the time. I usually took my lunch along and usually ate it while sitting on the tailgate of my truck under a good shade tree if the weather was nice.

One bright sunny day, my partner and I had just got settled for our lunch break. We were sitting on the tailgate of the truck. I opened a can of Sprite and set it down next to me. I had only taken a sip or two from the Sprite when all at once, a hummingbird flew down and lit on the Sprite can and began sucking up the sweet liquid. We just remained perfectly still and watched the bird enjoying my can of Sprite. It stayed there for a while and then flew off, but soon returned for some more.

I know hummingbirds are usually attracted to bright red colors. That's why most hummingbird feeders are painted red. This bird was not that particular. Maybe it was just hungry, but it didn't seem to mind the bright green color of the Sprite can.

The hummingbird didn't drink much of my can of Sprite, but I didn't really want to drink after the bird, so I ended up having to drink water with my lunch that day. I didn't really mind, because it's not often you get to see a beautiful hummingbird up close. I just wished my camera had been handy so I could have taken a picture of it drinking from my can of Sprite.

I had another experience one day when it was cold and I was eating my lunch while sitting in my truck. I saw a young doe deer walking down the logging road toward my truck. I just remained still to see what it would do. The deer slowly walked up to my truck and sniffed the front bumper and then walked right by my truck with me sitting in the driver's seat with the window down.

WAY BACK WHEN

I know folks in big cities often visit the crowded city parks and enjoy feeding the squirrels or pigeons, but I think I got just as much enjoyment watching that hummingbird and deer in the peace and quiet of the forest.

D-A-D Acrostic Dictums

An acrostic is generally a poem or phrase in which the first letters spell out a word. June 18 is Father's Day! How many of these old sayings apply to you? How many apply to your dad? Acrostics were created by Don Mathis; axioms were written by children and fathers across history.

Don't Ask Dad

He didn't tell me how to live; he lived, and let me watch him do it. – Clarence Budington Kelland

Daily Activities Duplicated

Being a great father is like shaving. No matter how good you shaved today, you have to do it again tomorrow. – Reed Markham

Difficulty About Defining

I felt something impossible for me to explain in words. Then, when they took her away, it hit me. I got scared all over again and began to feel giddy. Then it came to me... I was a father. – Nat King Cole

Definitely A Deity

Father! - to God himself we cannot give a holier name. – William Wordsworth

Debts Are Destroyed

Henry James once defined life as that predicament which precedes death, and certainly nobody owes you a debt of honor or gratitude for getting him into that predicament. But a child does owe his father a debt, if Dad, having gotten him into this peck of trouble, takes off his coat and buckles down to the job of showing his son how best to crash through it. – Clarence Budington Kelland

Destitute And Delighted

A father carries pictures where his money used to be. – Steve Martin

Dear And Departed

My father, when he went, made my childhood a gift of a half a century. – Antonio Porchia

Dad As Director

Dad, your guiding hand on my shoulder will remain with me forever. – Author Unknown

Define A Daddy

My daddy, he was somewhere between God and John Wayne. – Hank Williams, Jr.