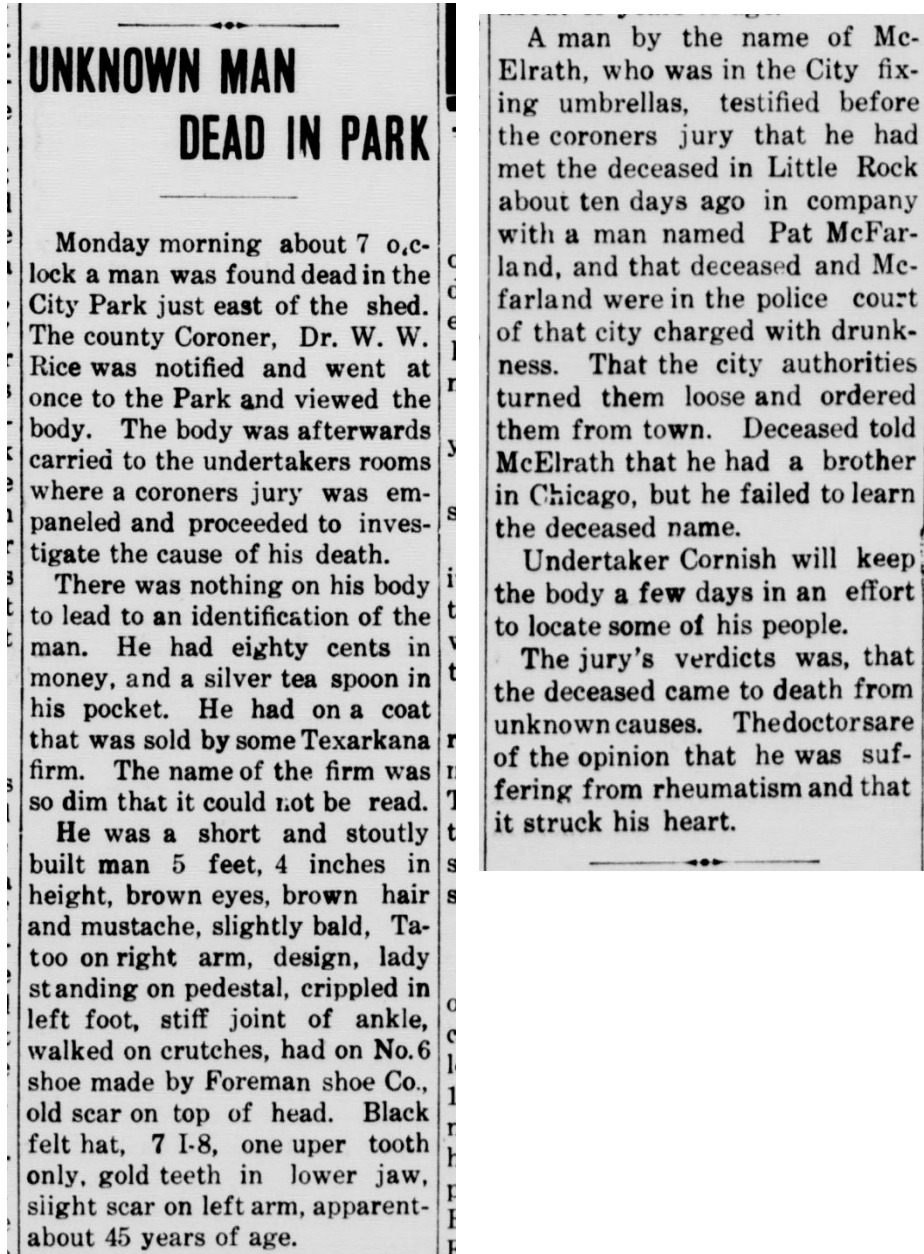


Jerry McKelvy's
WAY BACK WHEN
August, 2004

Here is the actual news story about "Old Mike" published in The Nevada County Picayune on August 25, 1911.



The few days mentioned in the article turned out to be 64 years that Mike's body was kept in the Cornish Funeral Home in Prescott. People came to Prescott from all fifty states and some foreign countries to see if this could be a lost relative, but nobody was able to identify him.

WAY BACK WHEN

According to one story I read, the funeral home staff gave the name “Mike” to the deceased man to distinguish him from another unidentified body in the funeral home which they had named “Pat”. That one was later identified.

Weeks and months went by and still the man’s identity remained a mystery. The Funeral Home finally displayed him standing up in small room or closet. Mike’s clothes were changed through the years as clothing styles changed. The funeral home even received offers from circuses wanting to buy Old Mike, but these offers were refused.

Years later, it became sort of a rite of passage for teenagers in Prescott and surrounding areas to go see “Old Mike”. Sometimes this was done as a dare because some didn’t believe the story about a body being kept for years at a funeral home. My wife and I married in 1971. She is from Missouri and I was telling her about Old Mike and I don’t think she believed me at first. Maybe that’s because she is from “The Show Me State”. To prove to her that I was not joking, I took her to the funeral home one day and asked to see Old Mike. We were escorted back to where he was kept. We didn’t stay too long.



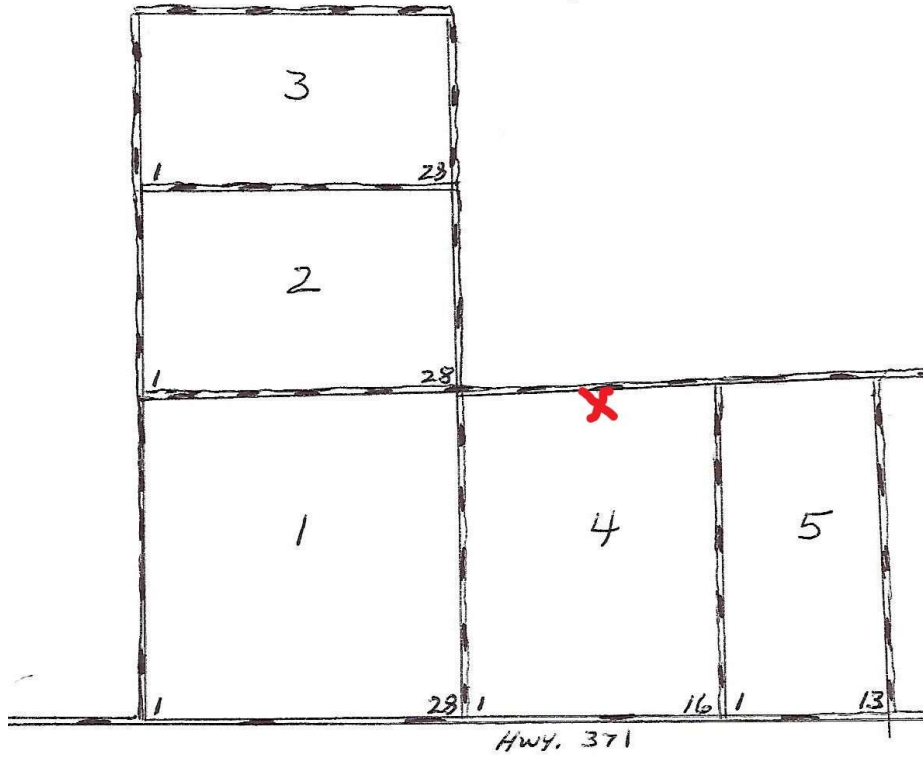
Finally, the state asked the funeral home to bury Old Mike and on May 12, 1975, Mike was buried in De Ann Cemetery in a plot purchased by the funeral home. Only seven people besides the preacher attended the burial. A small concrete marker was placed at the grave with a metal funeral home marker embedded in the concrete. The name on the marker was “Mike” with the death date of 1911. The birth date was left blank because it was unknown. A nice modern grave marker was later anonymously placed at the grave. A pencil was engraved on the marker because it was believed that Mike made his living by selling pencils as he traveled from town to town.

Many people in Prescott were not too happy about Mike being buried. He had been around so long that he had become part of the town. The funeral home staff said they had not kept a record of all the people who visited Old Mike over the years, but the number must have been in the thousands.

Did you ever visit Old Mike at the funeral home? Tell us about it and I will include your comments in the next issue.

WAY BACK WHEN

If you wish to visit Mike's grave, the red X on the map below is the location of his grave.

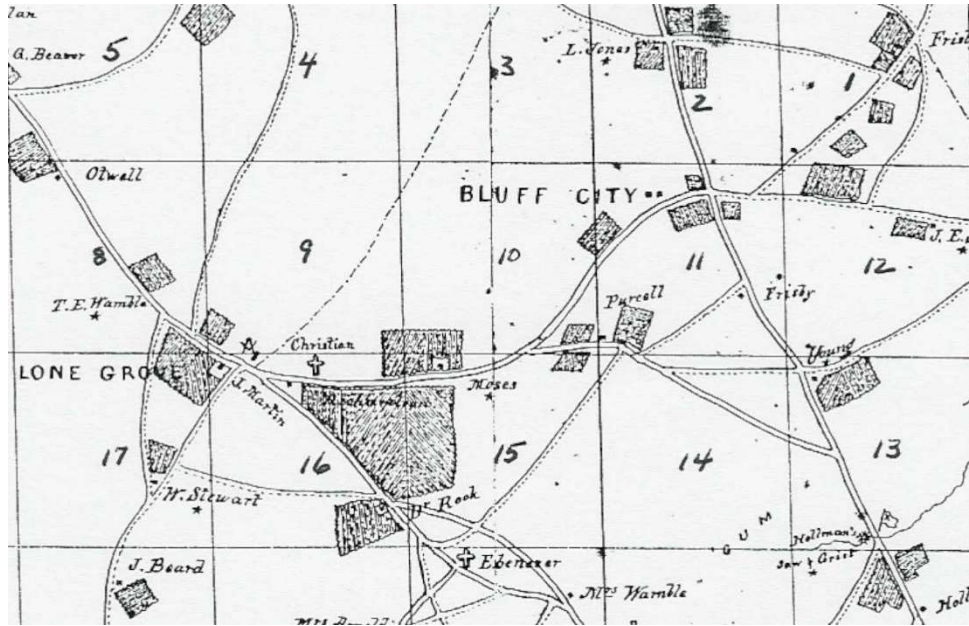


WAS BLUFF CITY ONCE CALLED PLEASANT GROVE?

The small town of Bluff City in Nevada County, Arkansas is one of the oldest communities in Nevada County. The earliest mention of Bluff City I have found is from a report of Brigadier-General E. A. Carr during the Civil War in 1864 recorded in the book *The War of the Rebellion*—Vol. 34, page 762. In his report, he writes-- “I am encamped along the road from Lone Grove toward Camden. Some of my foragers saw twelve rebels about a mile north of here today. I propose to take out the family of a soldier of the Tenth Illinois, which is at a crossroads called Bluff City, three miles east by northeast of Lone Grove”. Lone Grove was the early name for what was later called Gum Grove (see map next page). Lone Grove had a post office from 1858 to 1866 several years before Bluff City got a post office. It is not known why the name was changed from Lone Grove to Gum Grove. .

WAY BACK WHEN

Lone Grove, Bluff City, and Ebenezer are all shown on the 1865 map of Ouachita County which at that time included part of what is now Nevada County. This map shows the road system at that time and some of the landmarks. You can also see names of some of the early settlers on this map. The section numbers on the map were added by me. There is no legend on the map, but I think the dark shaded patches are probably cultivated fields or farms.



So, we have evidence that there was a place called Bluff City as far back as 1864. Now I will explain about the name Pleasant Grove.

I have a copy of a deed dated Sept. 5, 1861 by which W. B. Howard and Margaret J. Howard deeded three acres of land to the Committee of the Missionary Baptist Church at Pleasant Grove. The land description on the deed is the same location where the Bluff City Baptist church is located today. Does that mean that the community was known as Pleasant Grove back in 1861 or did the church members just refer to their church location as Pleasant Grove??

Another deed to the church dated Sept. 19, 1885 shows that I. E. W. Barlow and M. M. Barlow deeded one acre to the church. The church name on that deed is also Missionary Baptist Church at Pleasant Grove. That deed mentions that all the heirs of J. R. Barlow, deceased, agree to this transaction. The names of the heirs on the deed are

WAY BACK WHEN

E. W. Barlow, M. M. Barlow, T. L. Barlow, Amelia Barlow, John T. Nichols, and S. E. J. Nichols.

Another deed dated the same day (Sept. 19, 1885) shows that John T. Nichols and S. E. J. Nichols deeded another acre of land to the church. The church name on that deed is also Missionary Baptist Church at Pleasant Grove.

I have found no other reference to the name Pleasant Grove other than these three deeds to the Missionary Baptist Church at Pleasant Grove. We know that a post office application in 1876 says the proposed name for the post office will be Bluff City. The application gives the population of the village as 25 and says the office would serve 600 people. It says the nearest post office is Prescott, eighteen miles away. There has been a post office at Bluff City since 1876, but we can see from the post office application that very few people lived in the village at that time

That still leaves the question of why the Baptist church deed in 1861 called the place Pleasant Grove. That name must have been in use at that time or they would not have put it on the deed. A possible explanation is that some of the early settlers about 1860 called the name of the community Pleasant Grove, but for some reason, the name was changed to Bluff City by the time the 1865 map was printed. Changing the name of a town has been done before. In our area, Lone Grove became Gum Grove. I know of two towns in Missouri called Marble Hill and Lutesville. They were separated by a creek called Crooked Creek. It was decided in 1985 to merge the two towns and call the town Marble Hill. The Missouri towns of Flat River, Rivermines, Elvins, and Esther merged in 1991 to become the new city of Park Hills, Missouri.

Maybe somewhere there are other documents (church records, marriage licenses, letters, etc.) that explain why the Baptist church deed has the name "Missionary Baptist Church at Pleasant Grove". More research is needed.

I saw this in a 1925 newspaper—
Good, better, best, never let it rest
Until your good is better and your better is best.

WAY BACK WHEN



We are now in what is often called “the dog days of summer”. That is the period from July 3 to August 11. The weather is hot and humid in our part of the country. In the deep sand where I grew up, dogs often dug holes trying to find some cool dirt like the little dog in this picture.

To celebrate Dog Days this summer, Don Mathis has submitted this article called “A Tale of a Dog”. The “monkey blood” he mentions is mercurochrome antiseptic which I am sure you remember. Parents in the 1950s would use “Monkey Blood” for all types of cuts and abrasions.



The German shepherd pictured here is a dog I once had named Prince. He was a very friendly dog. Some people are more afraid of large breeds of dogs than the smaller breeds, but a veterinarian once told me that it was the smaller dogs that were more apt to bite.

A Tale of a Dog – by Don Mathis

I have a memory of a memory of me running across a field with a dog nipping at my heels. He would bite my shin and calf as I ran; I must have been four or five. I made it to the back door sobbing and shaking with fear.

Mom washed off the wound, comforted me, and put Monkey Blood on it. Daddy told me not to walk by there again. He said to stand my ground if a dog ever threatened me.

His advice works; I give wild dogs a wide berth but I don’t turn my back on them. And I have learned dogs are very protective – of their property, of their owners – but not so protective of their self.

If I fuss at a woman whose dog is pooping in my yard, the dog will probably growl and bark at me. But if I show anger at the dog, he will usually cower.

Dogs are much like their owners. If a person is friendly and generous, their dog often is too. If an owner is insecure and argumentative, so is their dog.

I try to avoid people who are anxious or antagonistic. It keeps me from getting bit.