

Jerry McKelvy's
WAY BACK WHEN

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THE GOOD OLD DAYS???

I think we are a little spoiled by all the conveniences available to us which make life so much easier than it was for our ancestors. We have air-conditioned homes, nice vehicles to drive, electricity to power all kinds of things, and electronic gadgets to keep us entertained. We sometimes hear the phrase “the good ole days” and in many respects, those days were better, but I don’t think many people living today would want to live like folks did in those days.

Just think how it was back about 1900 in our part of Arkansas. I’m not quite that old, so I can’t speak from experience. My McKelvy ancestors were farmers and lived in the small community of Rocky Hill in Nevada County, Arkansas, commonly known as the Goose Ankle community.



They were not rich by any means but my great grandfather, Alexander Fletcher McKelvy (pictured at left), owned quite a bit of land. In one old newspaper, he was called a well-to-do successful farmer of Union Township. In 1913, he was in Prescott and stopped by the newspaper office. The editor mentioned his visit in the paper and called him “my big, jovial friend”. He always signed his name as A. F. McKelvy, but was known in the community as “Fletch”.

He and his wife had eleven children but three died as infants. In 1907, he and his wife donated two acres of land for the Rocky Hill Methodist church near their home. His home place (pictured below) was about a quarter mile south of the church. He died in 1914 at the age of 62.

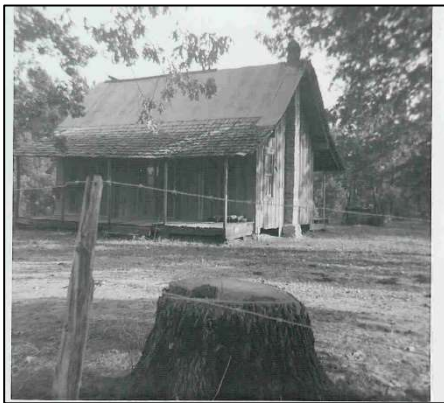


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His son and my grandfather, James Columbus “Gee” McKelvy, was also a farmer in that community and did some sawmill work. He was born in 1882 and married in 1908 to Katie May Kirk. They raised three children a short distance from the Rocky Hill church. The young boy on the right in this picture is my father, Ruel McKelvy, born in 1911. The older boy is Lee Roy and the girl in my grandfather’s lap is Myrtie, born in 1917.

This is a drawing of their home and the one I remember. I have fond memories of visiting them there when I was a young kid. The old house was vacant for a few years after their death and was destroyed by fire in the early 1970s. The land was sold and a deer hunting camp is at that spot today.



That was the main house, but Grandpa also had another smaller house just down the road which we always called “the little house”. It was also called “the weaning house” because each of the children lived in it for a while after they married. Many different families lived in this house at various times.

Besides these two homes, there were two barns, and several other outbuildings such as one might find around a farm house in those days. Each home in the community had a well or two to provide water for the family. Water had to be drawn up in a bucket for home use and for doing the laundry and heated in a wash pot with a fire underneath. Most

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families had a certain day of the week they called “wash day”. After the laundry was scrubbed clean and rinsed, it was hung on the clothes line to dry.

Raising a family in those days was difficult, especially during The Great Depression, but neighbors helped each other through the hard times. The community was well-populated at that time.



We still have these wagon bows used by my grandparents. These were covered with a canvas. I can imagine the whole family in the wagon pulled by horses making the long trip to Prescott.

The Goose Ankle community was about twenty miles from Prescott, the county seat. The roads in the early 1900s were in poor shape and travel was by wagon. The shortest route to Prescott was by Lackland Springs and then west to the Cale Road near Terre Rouge Creek.

Trips to Prescott were only made when necessary, probably not more than two or three times per year. Since travel by wagon was so

time-consuming and difficult, the tax assessor and tax collector traveled around the county each year to meet with residents in each community so they could assess and pay their taxes.

Children growing up in those days had to find their own amusements. They might get some type of toy at Christmas, but most of the time, they had to make their own entertainment. A trip to Prescott was an exciting time for small children. They could find a large selection of toys and other things not available in their community. They might even get to see a train come through town or, if they didn't misbehave, they might get some good treat to eat.

Several years ago, I asked some of the older folks I knew about their memories of those days. One of the questions I asked was how often they went to town.

8. How often did you go to town? Where?

Mr. Hartwell Irvin (born 1917)--About every two months, we went to Prescott by wagon. It was four hours each way. My father would put a rock in the fireplace at night and would put it on the wagon to keep our feet warm.

Mrs. Oleta Nelson (born 1924)-- Went to Prescott once to the doctor

Mrs. Aline McKelvy Claus (born 1917)--My dad went to town in the spring and fall. We were fortunate if we went once a year. I remember one trip, he brought home four yo-yos. They cost 25 cents each, but we were glad to get them.

Mrs. Goldie Meador (born 1916)-- Not until I was grown

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Mrs. Elsie Beaver (born 1908)--We went to Prescott one or two times a year. We would usually catch a ride with someone else

Mr. Harland McKelvy (born 1911)-- Went to Prescott two or three times a year

Mrs. Elloene Moore McBride (born 1921)--Went to Prescott once every two or three months at the most

From their answers, we can see that trips to a small town like Prescott were special occasions. Of course, most small communities in those days had a small country store. I'm sure most things they needed were purchased at those small stores and trips to larger towns were only made when necessary.

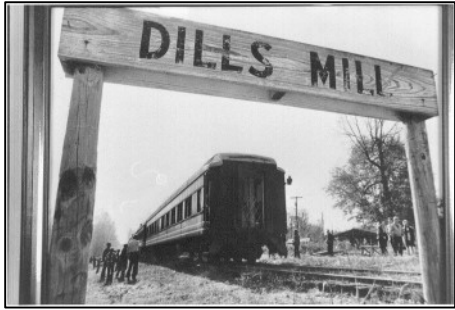
Trips were probably more frequent after the automobile became available. It was a great invention and changed the lives of everyone but at first only the wealthier people could afford them. My grandfather bought his first automobile in 1927. Those early automobiles had to share the roads with horse-drawn wagons and sometimes there were problems if a horse became frightened by an automobile. Many runaway accidents were reported in newspapers from that time. Many of the accidents were in Prescott when a horse became frightened by a passing train and ran away at a high speed sometimes throwing people from the wagon.

Most of the people in the Rocky Hill community were farmers or at least most everyone had a garden and raised food for their families. They also had fruit trees which provided apples, pears, and peaches for the family. They picked blackberries, wild plums, and persimmons when they were in season. My grandfather had a sorghum mill where sugar cane was made into molasses syrup. He also had a potato house where he stored and cured sweet potatoes he raised. The main crops grown were cotton, corn, peas, watermelons, peanuts, sorghum, and potatoes. Every farm family had cows, hogs, horses, mules, chickens, goats, etc. Horses and mules furnished the horsepower to pull farm implements and chickens provided eggs. Hogs were raised for slaughter and an old hen might end up as chicken and dumplings or for the main course at Sunday dinner. Most families had a smoke house where meat was cured after being slaughtered. Hog killing day was a major event on the farm with everybody pitching in to help. If a family had plenty of provisions stored up, it was said they had plenty of "hog and hominy". We still have my grandfather's old horse-drawn cultivator, corn stalk cutter, and mowing machine. We had his horse-drawn hay rake also, but I think all that is left now are the wheels. Hay in those days was hauled in loose loaded on wagons with pitchforks.

Women took care of all the household chores and helping pick vegetables from the gardens and gathered eggs from the hen house. They did the cooking, raised the children, and took care of the house. Women often got together to make quilts. A quilting frame was sometimes pulled up near the ceiling and could be let down during a quilting. The women sat around the frame stitching the quilt and visiting while they worked. I still have quilts my grandmother made for me when I was just a kid. One of them is made of quilt blocks brought by neighbors with the lady's names embroidered on each block. Many of the clothes were made at home. I can remember when feed for the chickens came in 100-pound cloth sacks in different patterns. Women would collect these sacks until they had enough of a particular pattern to make a dress or clothing for the kids. Most of the

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men wore overalls with a large pocket on the bib where they stored their Prince Albert smoking tobacco.



There was plenty of timber in that area, so some men worked at small sawmills called “ground hog mills” which were set up on a tract of land for six months or so until the timber was cut and then moved to another location. Cutting was done with cross-cut saws and the logs skidded by horses and mules. A man named J. W. Dill from Texas had a larger mill near Caney Creek which provided jobs for some of the men in the community. In 1918, the mill manufactured wooden spokes for automobile wheels and was converted into a hardwood lumber mill in 1928. The mill location is still shown on some maps as Dill’s Mill. The main county road went through the mill yard, but the road was straightened and moved a little further north when it was paved and designated as Hwy. 299. A scene in the movie “Boxcar Bertha” was filmed at the mill in the early 1970s which shows large stacks of lumber in the mill yard.

The Reader Railroad, known locally as “the Possum Trot Line” had been completed from Reader to Dill’s Mill in 1923. It was extended further south to Waterloo when oil was discovered in that area. Folks living in the Goose Ankle community could hear the whistle from the steam engine as the train made its regular runs from Reader to Waterloo and back.

The school for the community was located at Gum Grove until 1929 when it was consolidated with Bluff City. Some children had to walk up to three miles to school since there were no school buses. The two-room school was heated by wood stoves and there was no such thing as air conditioning in the summer months. School terms were planned around the farm work because children were needed at home during planting and harvesting seasons. The children at the Gum Grove school had to take their lunches to school because there was no lunch room at the school. Most of the time, an empty syrup bucket served as a lunch pail. There were no water fountains at the school, so the children had to go down the hill to a spring near the school to get a drink. Outdoor toilets served as the rest rooms for the school.

Nevada County Public Schools
J. W. PEETER, County Superintendent

MONTHLY REPORT CARD
of

Annie Mae Barlow
(Name of Pupil)

Age *8* Grade *3*

Gum Grove School

District No. *60*

Session Dec. 4, 1925

TO PARENTS:

Interest yourself in this report. Talk over the report with your child, giving praise for good marks, and help in overcoming poor ones. Note carefully the markings of days absent and come tardy.

Wilma E. Pittman, Teacher.

Principal.

Report card from Gum Grove school (1924-25)

Grading scale:	
E—95 to 100	M—65 to 75
G—85 to 95	P—Below 65
F—75 to 85	Passing Grade 75

Grading scale used in 1924-25 at Gum Grove

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It was not all work in those days. The school had programs and debates which were well attended by the people in the community. The young people sometimes had parties and it was a custom to stop work early on Saturdays giving the boys time for such things as ball games, going swimming in Caney Creek, or maybe going to see a special girl. In the days before radios, most folks went to bed early or sat around the fireplace and talked. Battery operated radios became popular and folks began to listen to their favorite radio programs. Electricity didn't reach Goose Ankle until sometime in the 1940s and that changed everything. The radio programs got better when batteries were no longer needed. It would still be a few years before television reached Goose Ankle.

My grandparent's had a Victrola record player in the spare bedroom. The grandkids liked to play with it when they visited. I still have a few of their old 78 rpm records which includes some religious songs like "Throw Out the Lifeline". Some of the other titles are "Christmastime at Pumpkin Center", "I've Taken All I'm Gonna Take From You", "The Lonesomest Girl in Town", "I Am a Roving Gambler", and "The Mysterious Blue Fox Trot". Some records were about tragic news events of that time such as "The Death of Floyd Collins" about a man trapped in a cave and "Little Mary Phagan" about a young girl killed while working in a pencil factory.

I remember visiting my grandparents and being excited to see Mr. Cross, the peddler, coming down the hill in his large truck loaded with just about anything a farm family might need. Peddlers were common in those days and usually came by every week or two on their regular runs.

Sundays were reserved for church services. Of course, animals had to be fed and tended to every day, but Sunday was considered a day of rest for the people and the animals. When the crops were all "laid by" in the summer, most churches had revivals which might last ten days to two weeks.

Many stories could be told about how people lived in what were called "the good old days". When you think about it, my grandparents and others who lived from about 1880 to 1960 saw many changes in their lifetime. They witnessed the coming of the airplane, the automobile, the radio, electricity, telephone, and television, but they also had to live through two world wars and The Great Depression. We also see many changes in our lifetime, and we wonder how people made it without electricity or television. We think something is terribly wrong if we are deprived of our computer or cell phone even for a few hours. The world is changing fast these days. About all we can do is hang on for the ride. I wonder what my grandparents who lived in the Goose Ankle community in Nevada County would think if they could see the world now.

Little flecks of powder

Good, better, best

And a little spread of paint

Never let it rest

Makes a girl's complexion

Until your good is better

Look like what it ain't.

And your better is best