

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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ACTIVITIES OF THE KU KLUX KLAN IN PRESCOTT

We have all seen stories about this organization in the news even in recent times. Most of the information we get about them is not too favorable. I have only seen members of the KKK in real life on one occasion. That was about 25 years ago in Texarkana. A large group of them dressed in full Klan attire (white robes and hoods) was demonstrating at a shopping center. The demonstration attracted a lot of attention from shoppers and motorists.

The Ku Klux Klan was formed in Pulaski, Tennessee in 1865 just after the Civil War. They disagreed with the reconstruction government set up after the war and didn't like the idea of northern carpetbaggers coming into the South trying to run things. They would sometimes try to intimidate certain politicians to force them to leave their jobs. They would ride through neighborhoods at night, terrorizing innocent people and leaving behind a burning cross. Their agenda was one with which many people agreed, but the methods they used soon gave them a bad name and the Klan was feared by certain groups of people. The member's identity was kept secret because they would wear white hoods to hide their faces.

The Klan had almost disappeared by the late 1800's, but in 1915 it was revived with new leaders and by the 1920's it had about three million members. It was popular all over the South even in small towns and farming communities. Even today, a large group of Klan members are headquartered in northern Arkansas near Harrison.

The first appearance of the Ku Klux Klan in Prescott was in the fall of 1922. Robed in garb of the order, ten white-robed klansmen entered the Methodist Church and took their places in front of the chancel. They gave Rev. Roebuck an envelope containing a small printed slip of paper which gave a condensed version of information about the KKK and a letter which the preacher read to the congregation. Two new \$20 dollar bills were attached to the letter. The preacher assured the visitors of the appreciation of the gift and his hearty approval of the principles for which the Klan stood.

A portion of the letter is as follows: "the KKK stands for the two greatest gifts that Heaven has bestowed, namely the Holy Bible for our guide and practices...and the American flag handed down by our forefathers who fought and died to keep it clean and spotless... We are here today to uphold the Holy Bible and its sacred writings, and to make America a better America for true and real Americans to live in. The KKK stands for all pure and right and is squarely against everything that is wrong". At the conclusion of the reading of the letter, the white-robed visitors silently withdrew from the church and the service preceded in normal fashion. (*The Nevada News- 11-2-1922*)

I think the catch-phrase in their letter was "true and real Americans". Those groups the Klan didn't agree with were not considered to be true and real Americans. (*continued on page 2*)

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In September, 1922 several Prescott citizens witnessed the first open air meeting of the KKK. From about eight to twelve o'clock at night, people driving down the Rosston Rd. could see huge fiery crosses burning in an open space in a thicket in the direction of the high school building and could see a large crowd of white-robed guards patrolling in a large circle around the multitude of klansmen. No outsider got close enough to be able to tell who composed the assembly. The number of automobiles which carried the men to the meeting was estimated to be from 44-55 and the crowd was estimated to be between 200 and 400. It was evident an initiation was being conducted and a banquet was held with several speeches being made, but none was close enough to hear or recognize the members.

A Negro boy who accidentally passed too close to the white-robed figures estimated the crowd at a million and said that the members were ten feet tall. (*The Nevada News-9-14-1922*)

In another article, it is recorded that the KKK had captured a whiskey still and put it on display early one morning on the streets of Prescott. Attached to the still was a message "Wildcatters and bootleggers had better take heed. We are after you. The Ku Klux Klan" The words Ku Klux Klan were written in red.

The KKK also visited the Christian Church in Prescott. During a normal Sunday service, the doors opened and hooded Knights marched down the aisle and formed a line before the preacher. They handed the preacher a note and some money. They carried the Holy Bible and an American flag.

The minister, Mr. Hall, was at a loss for words as he received the strange guests. He is not sure he even thanked them for the \$50 dollar donation. There were 18-20 men in robes but they seemed like a thousand. (*The Nevada News- 12-7-1922*)

I can only imagine what it would be like to be sitting in a worship service under these circumstances. Can you imagine how children would react to someone coming into church dressed in robes and hoods? The robes might not be all that unusual for some groups, but the hoods would be a bit unusual. If they had telephones back then, I'm sure the phone lines were buzzing as folks called their friends to tell what happened at church that day? Would our reaction today to such an incident be any different?

I did not know until I researched this that women were also members of the Ku Klux Klan. Actually they were an auxiliary organization known as the Women of the Ku Klux Klan. I found a mention of this group in the obituary of Mrs. Chris Benton who was buried at Bluff City Cemetery in October, 1926. The obituary states that she was laid to rest at Bluff City Cemetery by the women of the Ku Klux Klan of which she was a member. (*a portion of the obituary is printed below*)

Aunt Chris Benton was born December 15, 1860 and departed this life August 10, 1926 at the home of her son, Clate Benton near Lackland Springs, Arkansas. She became a member of the Methodist Church in her 16th year and was married to Walker Benton at the age of 18. She leaves to mourn her a loving husband, Walker Benton; two sons, Clate and Bennie; and

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six daughters, Etta, Lila, Lola, Annie, Ruby, and Susie. All the children are married except Bennie who works in the bank at Hope.

She was laid to rest in the beautiful cemetery at Bluff City, Arkansas by the women of the Ku Klux Klan of Chidester of which she was a member.

A long tribute to her life was printed in the paper written by her nephew, Thomas H. Benton of Chidester. (see the 8-14-1926 issue of The Nevada News)

From cemetery record:

Walker Benton born April 3, 1855 and died February 24, 1932

Christian N. Benton born December 15, 1859 and died August 10, 1926; wife of J. W. Benton

Notice that there is a one year discrepancy in Mrs. Benton's birth date from the article above.

It appears the KKK reached its peak in Nevada County in the 1920s. Don't be surprised if you learned that some of your ancestors were once members of the Ku Klux Klan.

THE MYSTERIOUS GURDON LIGHT

This is a good time of the year for a good ghost story. The small town of Gurdon, Arkansas is the setting for an unexplained phenomenon that has been seen by hundreds of people over the years. It is a mysterious light that is visible at certain times along the railroad track that extends west from Gurdon toward the Interstate. (not the main railroad).

It cannot be seen from the highways, so in order to see it, one must hike up the railroad track to a certain place. A dark, overcast night seems to be best and the best time to see it is just after midnight when the moon is full. The light has been captured in photographs and does not stay in the same place, but appears to be moving. It changes in intensity and appears to go on and off. It sometimes appears before you and then will be behind you. So far, the cause of the light remains a mystery. Some say it is swamp gas or reflections from headlights on the nearby Interstate. However, people have reported seeing the light long before the Interstate was built, so that eliminates that theory.

An incident happened on this railroad track in 1931 that some believe is the explanation of the light. A railroad foreman named Will McClain was murdered by an employee he had just fired and his head was severed. Some think the light is the light from the lantern of Will McClain's ghost as he searches for his head along the tracks.

Another legend says it was a railroad worker who accidentally fell into the path of an oncoming train and his head was severed. The moving light is from his lantern as he walks the tracks searching for his head. The death of the railroad worker is a documented fact and the man's head was never found. The mysterious light first appeared shortly after the accident. *(continued on page 4)*

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Many hundreds of people over the years have witnessed this “ghost light”. It has even been featured on the show “Unsolved Mysteries” and several other shows. You can find out more information on the Gurdon Ghost Light by searching the Internet. Just type in “gurdon ghost light” and it should bring up more detailed information. There are directions on where to go to see the light, what to take with you, and the best times to go.

This is a popular place for young folks to go on Halloween night. So, if you’re looking for something to do besides going trick or treat, get with some friends and go see the Gurdon Ghost Light. I wouldn’t advise going alone.

THE ARKANSAS STATE CHAMPION FARKLEBERRY TREE

Usually when we think of a state champion tree, we think of some majestic oak or a towering pine tree that stands out above all the other trees around it. That is usually the case, but some species of trees by nature do not get very big in diameter or reach great heights. Such is the case with the farkleberry tree. It is sometimes called a sparkleberry or a tree huckleberry and rarely gets above 30 feet tall.

In 1983 an unusually large farkleberry tree was discovered by James D. “Buster” Green, an employee of the Arkansas Forestry Commission, on land owned by International Paper Company in Nevada County and his supervisor, Harmon Ross of the Arkansas Forestry Commission nominated it to be a state champion tree. At that time the tree measured 8.1 inches in diameter at breast height and had a circumference of 25 inches. Even a small tree such as this deserves champion status when it grows larger than any others. After checking the records, the tree was awarded championship status by the Arkansas Forestry Commission.

The tree is not a perfectly formed tree as you might expect, but is forked and has some defects. These trees are considered ornamental and are not used in the forest products industry. In the springtime, it has beautiful bell-shaped white flowers and later on bears a small fruit which many birds and small animals love to eat.

The Arkansas state champion farkleberry tree is located on a small island in Caney Creek bottom near Hwy. 299 close to the old Dill’s Mill sawmill location about five miles southwest of Bluff City. I visited the tree a few days ago and found that it now measures 8.7 inches in diameter and 27.5 inches in circumference (not much growth for 19 years). The tree lost two of its larger branches from the ice storms in December, 2000, but is still holding on. The area around the tree is protected from cutting by International Paper and a management plan is in place as part of the company’s *Special Places in the Forest* program. The tree is visited once each year by company personnel as part of the management plan.

So now you know that in Caney Creek bottoms, there are other things besides water moccasins, beavers, and alligators. A champion farkleberry tree has its own special place in this corner of the “Natural State”.

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SOME WORLD WAR II VETERANS

November 11th will be Veteran's Day. Listed below are some World War II veterans from Nevada County that have connections in some way to the Bluff City-Gooseankle-Terrapin Neck area. The information comes from a book called *Men and Women in the Armed Forces from Nevada County*. The list may not be complete. We salute all the veterans who have served in the armed forces, both in war and peacetime.

Alford, John W.- Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Alford
Barksdale, Ruel G.-Army- son of Mrs. Loma Parker
Barlow, Thomas L.-Army-son of Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Barlow
Barlow, James P.-Army Air Corps- son of Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Barlow
Barlow, William D.-Army-son of Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Barlow
Beaver, Joe A.-Seabees-son of Mr. and Mrs. Ed Beaver
Beaver, Thurman E.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. Ed Beaver
Beaver, Adrian T.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. Ed Beaver (wounded)
Beaver, Woodrow H.-Army-son of Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Beaver
Beaver, William F.- Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Beaver (wounded)
Beaver, Willie R.- Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Beaver
Bradley, Percy E.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Bradley
Chamblee, Glenn W.-Army-son of Mr. and Mrs. Sam Chamlee (wounded)
Cummings, Robert L. Jr.-Army-son of Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Cummings (wounded)
Delaney, James E.-Army Air Corps-son of Mr. and Mrs. R. H. Delaney (died in plane crash)
DeWoody, John S.-Army- son of Mrs. Louis DeWoody
DeWoody, Ashley E.-Army Air Corps- son of Mrs. Barbara DeWoody
Franklin, Grady-Navy-son of Mr. and Mrs. B. W. Franklin
Gillespie, Glenn S.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Gillespie (wounded)
Griffith, Mavis V.-Army; Nurse-dau. Of Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Griffith
Gulley, Ewell, Jr.-Army-son of Mr. and Mrs. E. J. Gulley
Harvey, James E.-Army Air Corps-son of Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Harvey
Henry, Charles C. Jr. -Navy- son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles C. Henry, Sr.
Henry, Dawson C.- Navy- son of Mrs. Brodie Henry
Hildebrand, Hoyt J.- Navy- son of Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Hildebrand
Hildebrand, Harold J.- Navy- son of Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Hildebrand
Johnson, James E. – Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. M. C. Johnson
Johnson, Earl C.- Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. M. C. Johnson
Kirk, Dale-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Kirk
Kirk, Ivy R.- Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Kirk
Kirk, Garland K.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Kirk
Kirk, Duncan E.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Kirk
Kirk, William S.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Kirk
Knight, Herbert- Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. Ed Knight
Martin, Colwell W.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. T. W. Martin
Meador, Elmer L.-Navy- son of Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Meador
Meador, Stell-Army Air Corps- son of Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Meador
Moore, Hillery H.-Army Air Corps- son of Mrs. Katy Moore
Moore, Clyde J.- Army- son of Mrs. Katy Moore
Morrow, Isaac T.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Morrow
McBride, Millard D. -Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. W. W. McBride
McKelvy, Ruel M.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. James C. McKelvy

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McKelvy, Harland G.-Army Air Corps- son of Mr. and Mrs. O. F. McKelvy
McKelvy, Herman O.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. O. F. McKelvy
McMurray, Silas F.-Navy- son of Mrs. Mary S. McMurray
McMurray, Joseph R.-Army- son of Mrs. Mary S. McMurray
McMurray, Joseph R.- Army- son of Mrs. Mary S. McMurray (died from illness)
Nelson, Foy L.-Army Air Corps- son of Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Nelson
Nelson, Harl C.-Navy- son of Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Nelson (killed at Pearl Harbor)
Nelson, James C.- Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Nelson
Otwell, Clyde G.-Army-son of Mr. and Mrs. John Otwell
Plyler, Dexter W.-Army Air Corps- son of Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Plyler
Plyler, Joe M.- Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Plyler
Plyler, Algia J.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Plyler
Pruitt, Andrew J.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. John Pruitt
Pruitt, Lewis E.- Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. John Pruitt
Purifoy, Lawrence L.- Navy- son of Mrs. Susie Purifoy
Rhodes, B. F.- Navy- son of Mrs. Minnie Rhodes
Sarrett, Jay D.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. S. J. Sarrett
Sarrett, Nathaniel-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. S. J. Sarrett
Sarrett, Andrew H.-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. S. J. Sarrett
Sarrett, Dale-National Guard- son of Mr. and Mrs. S. J. Sarrett
Tunnell, J. P.- Army- son of W. B. Tunnell
Tunnell, Edgar C.- Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Tunnell (wounded)
Tunnell, William B.- Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Tunnell
Walker, Dennis H.- Army Air Corps- son of Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Walker
Williford, Everette W.- Navy- son of Mr. and Mrs. Felse Williford

BLACKS--

Blake, Dollison E.-Marines-son of Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Blake
Gulley, George L.-Army- son of Lige Gulley
Purifoy, Martin-Army- son of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Purifoy

TWO EASY RECIPES

HERSHEY PIE

A good pie to have in freezer when guests drop by unannounced.

1 (8 or 9 inch) graham cracker crust

Filling:

1 (8 oz.) Cool Whip
1 can Pecan-Coconut Frosting
2 Hershey chocolate bars with almonds,
(chopped)

Directions:

Mix frosting and chocolate bar. Fold in Cool Whip. Pour in crust. Cover with foil And freeze.

HAWAIIAN SALAD

Ingredients:

1 small can mandarin oranges
1 cup coconut
½ pint sour cream
1 small can pineapple tidbits
1 cup miniature marshmallows
pecans (cut up)

Directions:

Mix all together and chill in refrigerator.

HAPPY THANKSGIVING