

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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*****<http://sandyland.nevada.ar.us/>*****

COUNTRY PEDDLERS

Some of us older folks can remember the days when a country peddler came by our house. The one I faintly remember came by my grandparent's place when I was just a kid. I think Mr. Cross was his name. He worked out of Rosston, Arkansas and I assume he had a different route each day. It was always a time of excitement especially for a child in those days to see all the different things he had to sell.

Trips to town for farm people in those days were few and far between. So the next best thing was for peddlers to bring the stores to the farms. They didn't have everything a person might want, but did carry the basic necessities that farm women needed to run a household and some also carried sacks of feed for the farm animals and other items needed on a farm.

Peddlers were mentioned in the Bluff City local news column in the county newspaper in 1936. One item stated: *"Harvey and Sons have three peddling trucks on the road and L. M. Carter has two. If you want to buy something, just stop a peddler. They are as thick as fleas"*

Betty Thomas, a subscriber from Texas, grew up a few miles from Bluff City. She wrote me recently asking if I remembered peddlers. I'm sure the one she describes below is the same one I remember.

"Another peddler important to us ran a regular route from Rosston. I think he worked out of Ward's store there. He had a large truck with storage cabinets built on the back. The cabinet doors opened to shelves that were stocked with goods from the store. He carried some fabric and notions, canned goods, breakfast cereal, canning supplies, and staples like flour, corn meal, and sugar. He also carried some cow and chicken feed in the center at the back of the truck. It was really something to behold to a kid. The only thing that I was disappointed in was that he did not carry chocolate candy (it would have melted in the heat). He did have other sweets that really appealed to me. The truck was a small store on wheels. At that time not every family had a vehicle and gasoline was rationed thus "going to town" was not a regular event and many families depended upon the peddler for their household supplies. Things that he did not have on board could be "ordered" and he would bring them the next trip. He even took eggs and some produce in exchange for goods. There was not a lot of variety because there was not a lot of space, but I sure looked forward to the days when the peddler was coming by!"

She also mentioned the Watkins Man.

"I remember the Watkins Man. He came by erratically. We never knew when he was coming but when he drove into the yard with his trove of seasonings, spices, and flavorings, it was a treat. The big deal was vanilla flavoring. During World War II "real" vanilla was difficult to get. I do not remember if his vanilla flavoring was "real", but Mother thought it

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tasted better than any other. Part of his visit was simply that he was someone from another place and broke the monotony of the day to day grind."

Here is a little history of the Watkins Co. that I found on the Internet:

The J.R. Watkins Medical Company was founded in Plainview, Minnesota by Joseph R. Watkins in 1868. Watkins started his company after acquiring the patent for Dr. Ward's Vegetable Anodyne Liniment (later renamed "Watkins' Red Liniment"). The main ingredients of "Watkins' Red Liniment" were camphor from an Asian evergreen related to the cinnamon tree, extract of capsicum (from red peppers), turpentine oil and other botanicals. Watkins mixed his liniment in his kitchen.

In 1885, Watkins moved 25 miles south to Winona, Minnesota and developed a network of door-to-door salesmen to sell his liniment. Sometime around 1895, in addition to his liniment, Watkins began to sell the spices, vanilla, black pepper and cinnamon. These products were closely related to the ingredients of his basic product and had similar sources of supply. Watkins' network of door-to-door salesmen is the first recorded network marketing endeavor. At the time of his death in 1911, Watkins had more than 2,500 people selling his liniment and spices. The company was renamed, "Watkins Products." In 1912, shortly after the death of its founder, the company headquarters was relocated to an office building near the banks of the Mississippi River where it remained at the time of this writing in 1999.

In 1999, Watkins Products had 80,000 so-called "Independent Associates" throughout the United States and Canada and sold a wide range of food and home products, including both the original "Watkins' Liniment", as well as the spices of the original product line.

So, the Watkins Company has been around for a long time, and their products are still available for those who would like to try them. On the website, a catalog was advertised that features all their products and also job opportunities are available to those who would like to try their hand at being a modern day "Watkins' Man (or Woman)".

Another type of peddler in the "good old days" was the "ice man". That was a little before my time, but I do remember the "ice-box". It was some time before people could get accustomed to using the name refrigerator after they got electricity. The ice was carried in blocks (usually 50 pounds) from the delivery truck to the home with a pair of ice tongs. A block could be split with an ice pick. I have found references to Mr. Hambric Cummings being the local ice man around Bluff City. It seems to me that being an ice man might be a good job to have during the hot summer months. Maybe someone reading this could write down your memories of the ice man and tell us how your family kept things cold in the days before electricity.

City folks also had the "milk man" to deliver milk and butter to their homes, but country folks had no need for a milk man since most of them had cows to furnish milk for the family and butter was made at home. I can remember taking a turn at the butter churn when I was a kid.

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I was never much of a salesman, but I have had some experience as a peddler. We raised all kinds of vegetables on the farm as well as large patches of watermelons and cantaloupes. The sandy soil around Bluff City is well suited for melons. During the peak of the melon season, we would load up the pickup truck with watermelons and any other farm produce that was in season. We usually headed to Camden (the largest town near our farm) and didn't return until everything was sold which usually took all day. Sometimes we would go to the "rich" neighborhoods and knock on doors. Many of these city folks loved to get fresh farm produce, but sometimes we would get the door slammed in our face if we happened to wake someone up. We also cruised the black sections of town where many folks would be sitting out on their porches. We would just drive very slow and holler "Watermelons" until someone acted interested. Usually when we stopped, a group of people would congregate to see what we had to sell and sometimes we would sell several melons at one stop.

During these trips we usually stopped for lunch at a drive up place such as the Cow Bell which was then located on the corner near the hospital and order a hamburger and maybe a milk shake. This was in the days before McDonald's and Burger Kings. This was a highlight of my day since we didn't get this type food very often at home.

Usually by mid-afternoon, we were getting tired and ready to go home. We would stop at one of the smaller stores and try to sell the remaining melons for a very low price just to get rid of them. We usually made these trips about once per week. We soon learned where the best customers lived and where the best shade trees were to park under.

I also remember the times we would travel to Nashville, Arkansas during peach season and pick bushels of peaches, put them in the bed of our truck on loose hay, and then peddle them in the area where we lived. At that time you could buy a bushel of tree ripe peaches for \$1.00 if you picked them.

This type of door to door peddling is almost a thing of the past, but occasionally we do see a load of melons parked somewhere. Some cities require a peddler to get a permit to sell on the streets. Most farmers today sell their melons from their homes. They just pile them under a shade tree, stick up a sign, and hope someone will stop.

We often see some organization or group of people at the entrance of the local Wal-Mart store selling something. These days that location is the most highly visible place in the city. Young folks will sometimes have car washes to raise money for some project. And we sometimes see them just asking for a donation for their project without offering anything in return. I think it would be better to teach our young people to work to raise money rather than just asking for a hand-out.

While all of this is a form of peddling, I don't think any of it would surpass the excitement of seeing the country peddler or the Watkins man stopping by in the "good old days".

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF GORDON H. IRVIN (PART 12)
The Story of the Irvin Family near Bluff City in the 1920's

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My father was not a vain or presumptuous man. His pleasures were as simple as those just mentioned and his sorrows were real and unaffected. There were many aspects of so-called progress that he could not fathom nor understand any more than he could know the mysterious ways of God. He was dumbfounded that the earth was round and did spin like a top and was fearful lest, when it came his turn, he fall off the underside if this was really true. When he heard the sound of many voices over vast distances through wires that had no holes, and through air waves that were as silent as the grave, he predicted a great calamity and impending doom. And when men rode in chariots of fire and soared aloft like eagles, the last of the prophecies had been fulfilled, the earth would be destroyed by fire and time would be no more. He did not fear the waters, for: "And God said, and it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, the bow shall be seen in the cloud. And I shall remember my covenant which is between me and you, and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh." But he "was looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." He trusted in God and believed the Bible that "heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass away. And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

And now forty years later, we begin to have an inkling of how he must have felt, as the march of time thundered by, and of how the American Indians must have viewed the white man's desecration of their sacred heritage. His way of life had passed. The sun set upon his day. And now we, who were born half a century ago, likewise grope in the gathering doom. We too are the last of a species, the spent husks, driven before the wind into oblivion. Flourish here now, new mutated strains our genes produced, and now our fields lie fallow. We are confounded that men should leave this earth alive, that they should go to a place called heaven and gad about the universe.

Still, nothing under the sun is new for: "In the beginning the world was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." All the elements were there waiting to take shape and form. Also, all things must pass away to return again to the elements from which they came. Our forbears once made their peculiar noise and now they lie silent smoldering in the grave. Soon too the sounds we make shall die away as we stand the call to muster while the strange clamor of our off-spring fills the whole world with a mighty din. And they also, one day, shall surrender up their ways of life and join these silent ones.

It is said these are changing times we live in, but times are always changing. They cannot stand still. The river of life runs full tide and only the deadwood is cast upon the shore to lie still and strive no more. The young grow up and leave their homes to go forth to seek their way in a new world.

Uncle Joe has recorded in somber notes how his old home as he knew it broke up and disintegrated. He spoke of melancholy partings. And now the time has come for me to say something about that last year of my life at the old home, of the closing chapter in a boy's life. It is the year that brought my childhood abruptly to an end. It is perhaps as it should be the

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most climatic and memorable year of my life. Opal was married now and had a family living in Texas and Hollie had been away at school for several years. Thus I became the oldest of the children left at home. With Hollie's going, he bequeathed upon me the right and the duty of supervision and responsibility over my younger brothers and sisters. But the truth is, I never had either the personality or the vitality to fill his abdicated shoes. In this one short year I grew from a chubby, freckled-faced urchin into a six foot, one hundred and sixty pound man. I was healthy and felt strong and it was very good to be alive that year. Suddenly, I found myself looking down into faces that all my life I had peered up at and that was good. Of course, all the home folks knew I was still a child, but there were strangers who didn't and that was also very good.

This was one of those years when we made a bumper crop and prices were high. Everybody had money to spend. Many farmers were buying their first truck or car which brings to mind how Papa managed to trick himself into buying a model T Ford touring car. Neither Mama nor us children dared dream of ever owning any kind of a car, but this is how it came to pass.

This was the time of Star cars and Papa came home from town one day with his pockets full of brightly colored brochures. He was so elated over the pictures that in spite of ourselves we too caught the car fever. We dreamed about the car but didn't really know much except that it had a gear shift and, I believe, a foot feed gas pedal. Still, in the cold light of day, we knew the price (about \$600.00) was way beyond our means. Moreover, Papa also knew that we knew this and felt so secure in this knowledge that he kept on talking. "If only the price was a little lower," he would say. What he didn't know was that a high pressure model T salesman was on his way to our house at that very moment. You did not very often catch Papa off base, but for once he had no place to turn. The price on the Ford was well within our means, about \$300.00. Papa became so confused and flustered that he declared he would buy the Star car at any price. At this point, I stepped into the breach by saying the truth, that I already knew how to drive the Ford but might never learn to manipulate all the gadgets on the more expensive car. Well, I still don't understand it but we got the Ford and, I must admit, Papa enjoyed it more than any of us. He was always ready to go and never grumbled at the cost. Now it occurs to me that maybe we were the ones being tricked. We made a trip all the way to Galveston that summer to see Opal and the family on the Ford. I use the word on, because there were eight of us on, but not necessarily in the car. This journey with its excitement and adventure would make a wonderful story. Hollie joined us at Nacogdoches and made the trip with us to Galveston and Texas City where Opal was living. He returned home with us that summer to help cut and market the timber.

He and I worked against each other for we were on the opposite ends of a cross-cut saw cutting logs for several weeks following our Texas expedition. One who works on the end of a cross-cut saw all day does not complain about the quality of food that night, neither does he have insomnia nor need for psychiatric treatment. Hollie had two main objectives that I know of in coming home that summer. His senior year at Westminster College was coming up and he sorely needed money to complete his education there. This was his first reason, but of equal importance to him was the fact that I had completed all the schooling that was available there at home. He wanted me to return with him to Tehuacana, Texas where I might finish

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high school. On this last matter, he could not be sure as to how either I or our parents might feel about my going so far away while still so young. And so, like the cross-cut saw, he worked both ends against the middle. Papa paid us the same price per thousand feet of timber cut as he paid the other hands and in addition, he gave us our board and room. All day as we worked in the woods, Hollie impressed upon me the importance of education and at night he guided Mama's and Papa's thoughts in the same direction. So, by that summer's end, the plans were complete and there remained only the sad, sad business of saying goodbye; of feeling the loving eyes of my little brother and sisters upon me as they huddled near by; of seeing that forlorn look in my father's face; of hearing my mother pray. With that first parting, I said farewell not only to my home and loved ones, but also closed the last chapter in the book of my childhood.

THE END

I hope you have enjoyed reading Gordon Irvin's stories of his childhood days in Nevada County that I have published the last several months in *The Sandyland Chronicle*. He had a way of telling a story that makes the reader feel as though he were there on the farm in the Rocky Hill community in the 1920's. It probably means more to me that some of you because my grandparents lived less than a mile from the old Irvin farm. I am familiar with the layout of their farm and know about the landmarks and some of the people Gordon mentioned. It would be good if every family had someone to record stories like these for the younger family members that come along many years later.

If you have similar stories about your family, please send them in. I'm sure the readers of this paper would be interested in them.

I WISH WE STILL HAD THESE

In a past issue, I asked readers to send in things they wish they could still find in the stores. Here are some of the things mentioned by readers:

Peanut Patties
Coconut Grove candy bar
Cherry Hut candy bar
Zero candy bar
Saturday morning with Sky King
Sunday nights with Maverick
10 cent kerosene
5 cent Baby Ruth and 5 cent Pop Cola
A bear track (peanut patty) that was 5 inches in diameter for 5 cents
Putting peanuts in a bottle of Coca Cola and eating them while drinking the Coke

DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN...?

It took five minutes for the TV to warm up?
Nearly everyone's Mom was at home when the kids got home from school?

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Nobody owned a purebred dog?
When a quarter was a decent allowance?
You'd reach into a muddy gutter for a penny?
Your Mom wore nylons that came in two pieces?
All your male teachers wore neckties and female teachers had their hair done every day and wore high heels?
You got your windshield cleaned, oil checked, and gas pumped, without asking, all for free, every time? And you didn't pay for air? And, you got trading stamps to boot?
Laundry detergent had free glasses, dishes or towels hidden inside the box?
It was considered a great privilege to be taken out to dinner at a real restaurant with your parents?
They threatened to keep kids back a grade if they failed. . .and they did?
When a 57 Chevy was everyone's dream car...to cruise, peel out, lay rubber or watch submarine races, and people went steady?
No one ever asked where the car keys were because they were always in the car, in the ignition, and the doors were never locked?
Lying on your back in the grass with your friends and saying things like, "That cloud looks like a ..." and playing baseball with no adults to help kids with the rules of the game?
Stuff from the store came without safety caps and hermetic seals because no one had yet tried to poison a perfect stranger?
And with all our progress, don't you just wish, just once, you could slip back in time and savor the slower pace, and share it with the children of today?
When being sent to the principal's office was nothing compared to the fate that awaited the student at home?
Basically we were in fear for our lives, but it wasn't because of drive-by shootings, drugs, gangs, etc. Our parents and grandparents were a much bigger threat! But we survived because their love was greater than the threat.
Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, Laurel and Hardy,
Howdy Dowdy and the Peanut Gallery,
the Lone Ranger, The Shadow Knows,
Nellie Bell, Roy and Dale, Trigger and Buttermilk.
As well as summers filled with bike rides, baseball games,
Hula Hoops, bowling and visits to the pool, and eating Kool-Aid powder with sugar.
Didn't that feel good, just to go back and say, "Yeah, I remember that"?
Remember that the perfect age is somewhere between old enough to know better and too young to care.

How many of these do you remember?

Candy cigarettes
Wax Coke-shaped bottles with colored sugar water inside
Soda pop machines that dispensed glass bottles
Coffee shops with tableside jukeboxes
Blackjack, Clove and Teaberry chewing gum
Home milk delivery in glass bottles with cardboard stoppers
Newsreels or cartoons before the movie

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P.F. Fliers
Telephone numbers with a word prefix
such as (Overbrook 5-4601).
Party lines
Peashooters
Howdy Dowdy
45 RPM records
Green Stamps
Hi-Fi's
Metal ice cubes trays with levers
Mimeograph paper
Beanie and Cecil
Roller-skate keys
Cork pop guns
Drive-ins

Studebakers
Washtub wringers
The Fuller Brush Man
Reel-To-Reel tape recorders
Tinkertoys
Erector Sets
The Fort Apache Play Set
Lincoln Logs
15 cent McDonald hamburgers
5 cent packs of baseball cards - with that
awful pink slab of bubble gum
Penny candy
35 cent a gallon gasoline
Jiffy Pop popcorn

Do you remember a time when..

Decisions were made by going "eeny-meeny-miney-moe"?
Mistakes were corrected by simply exclaiming, "Do Over!"?
"Race issue" meant arguing about who ran the fastest?
Catching the fireflies could happily occupy an entire evening?
It wasn't odd to have two or three "Best Friends"?
The worst thing you could catch from the opposite sex was "cooties"?
Having a weapon in school meant being caught with a slingshot?
A foot of snow was a dream come true?
Saturday morning cartoons weren't 30-minute commercials for action figures?
Spinning around, getting dizzy, and falling down was cause for giggles?
The worst embarrassment was being picked last for a team?
War was a card game?
Baseball cards in the spokes transformed any bike into a motorcycle?
Taking drugs meant orange-flavored chewable aspirin?
Water balloons were the ultimate weapon?
If you can remember most or all of these, then you have lived!!!!!!

CHIDESTER GIRLS GO TO STATE TOURNAMENT IN 1940

The Chidester girls basketball team played in the A. A. U. tournament in Little Rock in March of 1940. The girls were the Ouachita County champions for the three previous years. The players were: Ernestine Stroud, Helen Cubage, Cleo Blagraves, Wilma Creech, Bertha Haire, Lucille Stinnett, Ila O'Keefe, Gracie Bray, Geraldine Epperson, and Elga Mae Creech. The coach was Ray Cook. A picture of this team can be found in the Camden News in March, 1940 but the quality of the copy was not good enough to include in this paper.