

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Jerry McKelvy, Editor

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REMINISCENCES OF CIVIL WAR DAYS

By Cora Powell Bragg

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I was born six miles west of Camden, the town in which I now live. My father, Eber Bragg, and four brothers, Ira, Newport, Hosea, and Samuel, came to Arkansas in 1847 from Alabama, making the trip to New Orleans by boat and from there to Arkansas by covered wagon. They all settled and built homes a few miles west of Camden, which was then only a village consisting of three stores owned by Tyra Hill, Joe Reeves, and “Buddy” Smith’s father. My father later moved farther on up in the country; fifteen miles north. As soon as possible, he secured help and built a double log house (which stands today) with a wide hall between, a long front porch, and two shed rooms off the back. In the back yard, two other log houses were built, one for a kitchen and one for slaves. Some of the accessories soon acquired were horses, mules, chickens, pigs, sheep, and last but not least, an honest watchdog or two and some good hunting dogs.

Fish and game were abundant. It was not an uncommon sight to see deer leaping by the house. Once as Father had started to the river to fish, he saw five deer lying on a hillside sunning themselves. He was equipped with a gun and killed all five. Needless to say, the fishing trip was abandoned. He came home, got a Negro man and wagon and team to bring home the venison. Nothing like this was ever sold in those days. The surplus was divided among the neighbors or cured for future use. Among the fine meats that were quite often on our table were fish, squirrels, duck, quail, bear, and beaver. My father never in his life bought meat nor lard and never incurred a debt though he lived to be eighty-two, and had little money ahead. He raised enough wheat for home use until after the war. Only by crude methods could this wheat be threshed, ground, and made into flour. The final product, however, made the sweetest biscuits I have ever eaten. After the war, flour could be bought at the price of \$25 per barrel. Then we had to practice strictest economy in its use, and biscuits were by no means on each days menu. We grew some rye also which made good light bread and pancakes and when parched was a good substitute for coffee. All cooking was done in the log kitchen, apart from the big house about fifty yards by a Negro mammy—familarly and lovingly called “Mub” (the children’s attempt as saying mother). Dutch ovens and iron pots suspended by hooks in a huge fire place and iron boilers and skillets were the kitchen furnishings. Foods prepared in this kitchen were then carried to the white folk’s house to be served.

I remember quite well our dread of an invasion by the federal soldiers. Though they never came, all necessary precautions were taken and our treasures were hidden out. I have in my possession now a chest one hundred years old that was made by my father in his blacksmith shop. This chest was filled with valuable hand-woven bed covers and other things and a little money and buried in a field. I have a fifty-cent piece, coined in 1808, and some half-dimes, which were in the buried chest. Now this chest is dressed in cretonne and sits in my room serving as a place for my wearing apparel. I was about twelve years of

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age when the battle of Poison Springs (ten miles west of here) was fought and shall never forget the terror of being within hearing distance of the cannon's roar. The battle began late in the afternoon, near dark, and the night passed in dread and watching. My father who was too old for service as a soldier, visited the battle field a day or so later and he said that he had never beheld such a sight. Dead bodies, only half buried, feet protruding, were heaped all about and the stench was sickening. He brought home some cannon balls and a rifle that were found on the scene. Most of those killed were Negroes who had deserted their masters and joined the federals.

My father's house was always open to Confederate soldiers and many partook of his hospitality. I remember one time during a cold spell and snow storm, all furnishings were moved from one big room and pallets made all over the floor for soldiers. They were packed on these pallets like sardines in boxes. They were, with one exception, clean, gentlemanly and appreciative fellows. The exception was a man with long, stringy hair reaching to his shoulders. They called him "The Gai" and jestingly quarreled about whose sweetheart he should be. Of food there was plenty, but such an overflow of visitors made much hardships on the women who had to do the cooking and serving and trudge through the snow from the kitchen to the main house. Their work, however, was always done cheerfully.

One of the outstanding memories of my childhood days is when as children we spent many evenings in the slave quarters listening to "hant stories". After these sessions we would have to be accompanied back to our house and be permitted to walk in front. The feeling that something was going to grab us from the rear was very uncomfortable. My mother spun and wove all our clothing. The wool and cotton from which the thread was made was also home grown. I still have my mother's spinning wheel. One of Father's slaves was a shoemaker, and made our brogan shoes of rawhide. Later a tan yard was put in—then our shoes were of a better quality. We felt so well-dressed in a new homespun and a pair of tanned shoes, and hat braided from wheat straw. Even our sheets, pillow cases, and towels were home-spun and though rough, they were durable. Our dyes were obtained from nature's own supply. For black, we used the sumac, for brown, walnuts hulls or leaves, and for gray, sweet gum bark. Copperas made our orange, sweet bay leaves our yellow, but to our sorrow, we never had a red. Finally someone brought us some indigo seeds which we planted. From the leaves of these plants, by a certain process, we obtained the blue dye. Then how proud we were of our blue dresses and blue checked counterpanes. As a substitute for soda, the ashes from corn cobs were sometimes used. We had to send to Louisiana for salt and I have known people who, when out of salt, extracted it from the dirt in their smoke houses. Matches were very scarce and we kept fire by banking ashes over the coals. I remember occasions when neighbors came to "get a chunk of fire". Tallow candles and pine knot fires then afforded the only lights we had at night. Our papers were the *Arkadelphia Standard*, edited by Adam Clark, the *Atlanta Constitution*, and the *New York World*—all weeklies. Neighbors passing would bring each other's mail from Camden.

Our medicine consisted mostly of herb teas, such as boneset, sage, barks, penny-royal, catnip, etc. We had limited quantities of quinine, but no capsules---we had to take it in coffee or molasses. In serious cases a doctor would be called, but usually the limit of his knowledge was blister-plasters. As to schools—the teachers were like the doctors -

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knowledge was limited, too. The first school I attended was called “the one-horse meeting house”. It had split-log benches with legs so high our feet dangled in the air. The table was a long split log affair, too. The teacher was an old soldier of the war of 1812. We were kept in the blue backed spelling book until we mastered it thoroughly. It was the only text. Later on I was transferred to another district where facilities were some better and we had McGuffey’s readers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, and also a dictionary.

Those were the good old days
Those days of yore,
But I would not recall them
As they were before.
The modern times, though very fast,
Are better far than those of the past.



Students Identified: Mrs. Gracie Faye Cummings McCaskill was able to identify the students in the above picture of Bluff City students which appeared in the January, 2007 issue. Refer to that issue for a larger picture:

Front row (left to right)—(1) Thelma Greer, (2) Gladys Morgan, (3) Adell (or Idell) McGee, (4) Carlene Robinson, (5) Bertha Mae Tunnell, (6) Minnie Meador, (7) Travis McGee

Middle row (left to right)—(1) Dick Harvey, (2) Hershel Carter, (3) Edgar Pringle, (4) Ashley DeWoody, (5) Gerald Carter, (6) Woodrow Carter, (7) Paul Barlow, (8) Garland McWilliams, (9) Teacher—Helen Benton (not sure about this one)

Inside Bus (left to right)—(1) Marguerite Henry, (2) Grady Faye Cummings, (3) Pearl Moore, (4) Laverne Carter, (5) Edith Bever, (6) Gladys McWilliams, (7) Pauline Cummings, (8) Dawson Barlow, (9) G. P. Walker, (10) Dave Erwin

**At least a fat man knows where his cigar ashes will land.
Fewer marriages would skid if more people who said “I do” did.**

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AN AMAZING SPIRIT

Pike County, Arkansas is well known for being the home of singing star Glen Campbell and is the location of Crater of Diamonds State Park where visitors can search for real diamonds and keep what they find. It is also the home of Mr. Carleton Denny who celebrated his 103rd birthday on January 12, 2007.

Mr. Denny's birthday was recognized by the local newspaper at nearby Murfreesboro and was a cause of celebration for Mr. Denny and his many friends. Mr. Freeman Henderson, who writes a weekly column for the *Murfreesboro Diamond*, wrote an interesting article about Mr. Denny. He is well acquainted with him since he once preached at the small Methodist church where Mr. Denny worships. His son, Jim Henderson, has taken over the preaching there now.

According to Mr. Freeman's article, Mr. Denny was at home just before his 103rd birthday with a clipboard in his lap working the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* crossword puzzle. He had already finished the Cryptoquote. These puzzles help keep his mind sharp and anyone who has tried them knows that they are not easy.

Mr. Denny is fortunate because his children live nearby and take turns checking on him.

Mr. Denny was born near Lake Michigan January, 12, 1904. His family was involved in fruit growing there, but got interested in the timber and mineral resources of Arkansas. They built a saw mill in Arkansas and divided their time, spending the summers in Michigan and the winters in Arkansas. The Dennys found Pike County to be a pleasant place to live. He built a house there and in 1920 married Vahnita McKinney. They made their home there for 59 years, raising a family of two boys and two girls.

Mr. Denny credits his father Edgar with his interests and attitude about life. "He taught me a lot about mechanics, electricity, and science. I read a lot and concluded the Bible was not only a valuable spiritual guide to my soul, but was also a general history and scientific reference book that substantiated what I had learned."

Over the years Mr. Denny has been involved in many activities, including church work, Boy Scouts, the local water department, Ozan Lumber Co. as a millwright, gasoline distributor, timberland manager, radio and TV repair service, and author. His books include: "*The Diary*" in 1986; "*In the Slow Lane*" in 1996, and "*The First 100 Years*" in 2004.

He has always been interested in short wave radio and built much of the equipment himself. During World War II, he relayed messages to and from overseas so families could contact troops in the field. He sometimes relayed 40 or 50 messages a day and he continued this service until a few years ago.

In 2003, he was named Arkansas' Most Amazing Spirit at a meeting in Little Rock. There were eleven nominees from all over Arkansas including doctors, lawyers, body builders, school teachers, and others. The late Paul Eells was master of ceremony and TV

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star Linda Evans was the featured speaker. It was soon obvious that the 99 year-old gentleman from Pike County was the winner of the Most Amazing Spirit award.

His introduction at the awards dinner read verbatim:

“An accomplished organ player (beginning at age 65), photographer, and amateur radio operator, 99 year-old Carleton Denny has consistently led an active life with an upbeat outlook. His daily activities include reading, working crossword puzzles, playing the organ, researching and emailing others on his computer, riding his four-wheeler to check on his woodlands, and feeding the fish in his stock pond.

To maintain his active lifestyle, Denny eats healthy food, sleeps eight hours each night, and gets plenty of fresh air and exercise. He attends church regularly and engages in volunteer work with local charities. Some of Denny’s accomplishments include designing and building his house, supporting the Boy Scouts of America for more than 50 years, volunteer fire chief of the local fire department, and serving on the town council. As a volunteer military affairs radio system, Denny who built his own radio station, successfully passed thousands of messages between service members and their families over a span of 39 years.”

Congratulations to Mr. Denny on reaching this milestone in his life.



Photo from Murfreesboro Diamond

Mr. Carleton Denny at age 103

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A PET JUNE BUG (from the 9-9-1909 issue of *The Nevada News*)

Little Rock—For the past week the authorities at the Arkansas penitentiary have been having much trouble restraining Wade Beck, a white man serving 6 years from Miller Co. on a charge of forgery and it's all because some other convict has stolen Beck's June bug.

Like the convict who educated cockroaches, Beck has passed his time in his cell with a June bug. He acquired the bug last June and carried it with him to his cell. A cigar box became the home of the bug and every time he went to a meal, he would secure something for the bug. He kept salt and water in the box with the other edibles for his pet and when sick, if he was given a dose of medicine, the bug was given his share.

The attachment between the bug and the man became so strong that when the insect disappeared from its box during the past week, Beck went on the war path and has been at dagger's tip with the other convicts. Efforts are now being made to replace the missing bug in order that the weak-minded convict may become placated.

A FIGHT ON THE SCHOOL HOUSE ROOF (from the July 28, 1910 issue of *The Prescott Daily News*)

In an altercation yesterday between Walter Rogers and Roy Jobe at Cale, the former was struck in the head with a carpenter's square, and received wounds which are very serious. The two men are carpenters, and were at work on the school house at Cale, putting on a new roof, when the difficulty arose. The fight occurred near the roof, about fifteen feet from the ground, and Rogers, who was unconscious after the blow, was taken down by a half dozen or more men who were attracted to the scene. Jobe surrendered to the Justice of the Peace at Cale, and Rogers was taken home, where physicians removed a portion of his skull which was fractured by the blow administered by Mr. Jobe.

Update—August 2, 1910 issue

Walter Rogers is getting along as well as could be expected from his injuries when Roy Jobe struck him on the head with a carpenter's square during an altercation at Cale School. Doctors removed a piece of his skull about one and a half by two and a half inches. Mr. Jobe, who gave himself up to officers, was placed under a \$250 bond, and his trial is being deferred, to await the result of the blow.

The Trial—Sept. 30, 1910 issue

Trial of Roy Jobe took place at Cale yesterday before Justice J. L. Daniel, and the charge of assault with intent to kill was dismissed. The court found him guilty of aggravated assault and fined him \$50 and costs and five minutes in jail. Justice Daniels had Justice Hirst of Georgia Township and Justice Parker of Union Township as advisory counsel in the matter. The prosecution was represented by Prosecuting Attorney-elect Haynie, and the defense was represented by R. P. Hamby. **Correction in next days' paper:** R. P. Hamby was a

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stenographer and did not represent Mr. Jobe in the trial. Mr. Jobe was represented by R. O. Westmoreland.

INTERESTING NEW ITEMS FROM DAYS GONE BY

Prescott Daily News (5-2-1907)

Thirty trains a day come through Prescott (9 passenger trains and 21 freight trains).

Nevada News (2-4-1909)

Mrs. W. R. Barham of Boughton is mourning the loss of her pet parrot which had been a member of the household for 32 years. The bird was unusually bright in its conceptions and very clear in its talk. "Polly" was 34 years old having come into the possession of Mrs. Barham when it was two years old. The parrot died after a short illness.

Nevada News (March, 1909)

Severe storms across Arkansas. The city of Brinkley was practically destroyed. Nevada County was hard hit with damage in several places. Several dwellings were demolished at Bluff City with one Negro badly crippled. Three members of the A. T. Gaston family of Chidester were killed and four hurt seriously. Fifteen people in Chidester suffered broken limbs. Fifteen dwellings were destroyed and two churches and a school house were destroyed.

James Hairston has contributed this poem he wrote for his grandchildren to say at the start of each day. This would be good for adults also.

Just Like You

**Hear these words, oh Lord I pray,
And protect my life throughout this day.
I ask forgiveness, straight from Thee,
For things I've done that shouldn't be.
Through Your love alone, You still my fears,
Touch my cheek, and wipe my tears.
Take me now and mold me true,
To be more and more...just like You!**

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RAISIN BRAN MUFFINS (from Teresa in Arkansas)

Ingredients:

1 cup raisin bran cereal
1 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 cup sugar
1 Tablespoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 egg (or egg substitute)
1 cup skim milk
1/4 canola oil
1/4 chopped nuts (walnuts or pecans)
additional raisins if desired

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a large bowl, mix first 5 ingredients with fork. In small bowl, beat egg slightly with fork and stir in milk and oil. Add egg mixture all at once to flour mixture. Stir with spoon until flour is moistened. Batter will be lumpy. Spoon batter into paper lined muffin cups or pre-greased muffin tin. Bake for 25 minutes or until golden brown. Immediately remove muffins from pan. These are easily frozen and may be microwaved for breakfast on the run and are pretty healthy for you.

QUICK MASHED POTATOES (from "Simple and Delicious" in Arizona)

Prepare a 5# bag of potatoes...to include mashing with butter and seasoning. Spoon mashed potatoes into a large cupcake pan or individual loaf pans. You don't need to grease the pan. Place pan in freezer until potatoes are frozen through. Remove from pan and place into individual freezer bags. This freezes nicely for at least a month. When ready to serve, place individual serving in micro safe bowl, place a pat of butter on top, and microwave on high about 1-2 minutes. Once potato is heated through – serve. Tastes just like fresh prepared.

MEXICAN CASSEROLE (from Janie Franklin in Arkansas)

2 lb. Ground beef
1 small onion
2 cans cream of chicken soup
2 cans Rotel w/ chili peppers
2 cups grated cheese
Doritos

Mix soup, cheese and Rotel. Brown ground beef with onion. Layer: chips, ground beef, and cheese mixture. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.