

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Valley Lumber Co. sold the mill and railroad to Mansfield Hardwood Co. about 1923. It was about this time that the railroad was classified as “a common carrier” and began to be used to haul oil from Waterloo and timber products back to Reader.

By this time another mill had opened about half way between Reader and Waterloo. This was known as Dill’s Mill named for J. W. Dill. It was to become a well-known landmark in that area for the next fifty years or so.

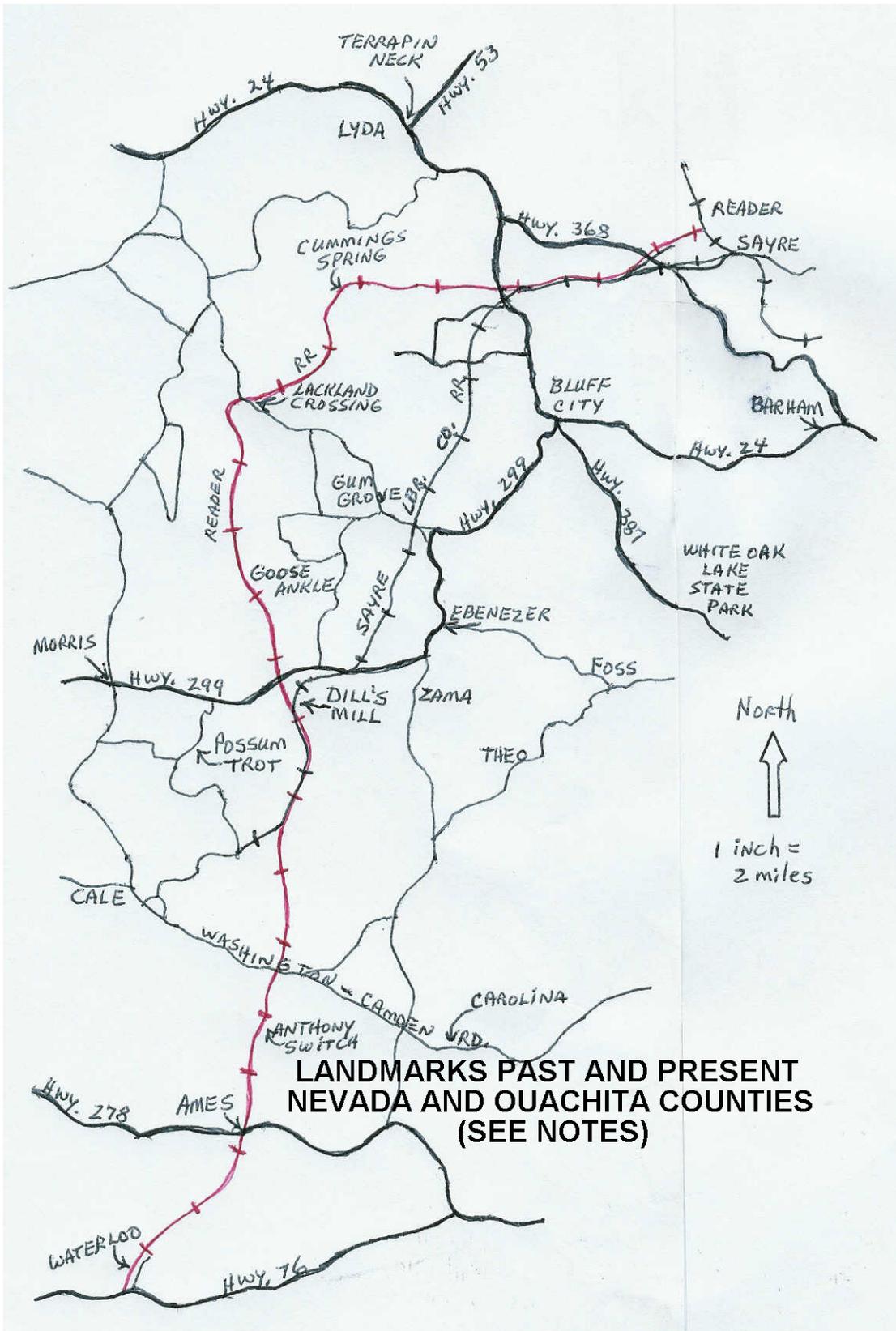
Dill’s Mill was located on what is now Hwy. 299 at the Caney Creek crossing. The mill was a large operation and employed many men over the years. I was told that it even generated its own power in the days before electricity and even provided power to nearby homes. There was a company store and several houses for some of the employees. The mill was converted to a spoke mill in 1918, manufacturing wooden spokes for wheels. According to a newspaper item, Mr. Dill had an order from the U. S. Government but was having trouble finding enough men to work. I don’t know how long the spoke mill lasted, but in 1928, Mr. Dill announced plans to open a hardwood mill at the old mill site. J. W. Dill died in 1935 and is buried in Woodville, Texas.



When I was growing up in that area, Dill’s Mill was going strong, employing several men. At that time it was usually called Caney Creek Mill although the official name was Acorn Lumber Co. It was operated by Charlie Green of Camden with the help of Gerald Johnson, a trusted employee who lived at the mill site. The public road was still gravel and passed through the mill yard south of the present highway location. After heavy rains, the mill site would be isolated by high water for a day or two until the water receded. The railroad tracks were also flooded at times since it was located near Caney Creek.

The steam train made regular runs back and forth from Reader to Waterloo about three days per week. The steam whistle could be heard for miles as it made its way slowly through the countryside. The railroad crossed six main roads on the route from Reader to Waterloo. First it crossed Hwy. 368 at the edge of Reader. The next crossing is about three miles from Reader on Hwy. 24. From there it entered the deep hardwood forests crossing many sloughs and creeks until it reached the Lackland Springs Rd. (a gravel road). Then it was back into the deep woods for the next several miles near the Goose Ankle community until it reached Dill’s Mill on what is now Hwy. 299. Further south, the railroad went through more dense woods, bypassing the Possom Trot community and then crossing the gravel road east of Cale. A small mill (a pole peeling plant) was located near this crossing called Anthony Switch. The next crossing was at a place called Ames on what is now Hwy. 278 (the Rosston-Camden highway). The final stop was at the oil refinery at Waterloo where the engine was turned around and made ready for the return trip to Reader with a payload of oil in tank cars from Waterloo and lumber and cross-ties from Dill’s Mill.

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE



THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Mr. Tom Long purchased the Reader Railroad in 1956. He had so many requests from people who wanted to ride the steam train that he decided in 1962 to begin hauling passengers along with the timber products and oil. Tourist brochures were printed up and thousands of people flocked to Reader to take a trip back into the past by riding a train pulled by a steam locomotive. The following people were listed in 1962 as employees: W. T. M. Long, owner; Sallye Mosely, agent; Nat Turner, Engineer; C. O. Sykes, Brakeman; Jesse Peterson, Shop Foreman; Vernie (Happy) Walker, Conductor; W. A. Adams, Regular Engineer, and W. A. Adams, Jr., Hostler.

I can remember one day when several of the young people of the Bluff City area (including myself) decided to make the trip on the Possum Trot Line. Best I remember, the trip took just about all day. The train made its way slowly over the old tracks through the beautiful hardwood forests. At that time the large hardwood trees almost formed a canopy overhead as the train chugged along. All kinds of wildlife could be spotted in the dense forests.

The train made a stop at Nelson's field near the Goose Ankle community. The field was about the only open land along the entire route. A step had been constructed over the fence so that passengers could step over into the field and take pictures of the engine as the dark smoke bellowed from the smokestack.

At Waterloo, we had a picnic lunch while the engine was being turned around for the return trip. That was my only time to actually ride on the Reader steam train, but I could hear the whistle from our home every time it made a run. I still have an old Super 8mm home movie I made of the train on its way from Reader to Waterloo.

About 1971, the railroad was used in a movie called *Boxcar Bertha* that was filmed in the area. This caused quite a bit of excitement. It was not every day that well known movie stars like Keith Carradine and Barbara Hershey were seen in this part of Arkansas. Many local folks also had small parts in the movie. One scene of the movie was filmed at Dill's Mill. Stacks of lumber can be seen in the background in that scene.

The last scheduled run for the Reader was on Dec. 2, 1972. It then ran once per month until May, 1973, when service was discontinued except for a few special runs. The Berry Asphalt plant at Waterloo closed in 1973 and the railroad was having trouble meeting new federal regulations for passenger service. A decision was made to start taking up the track beginning at Waterloo and working back toward Reader. A part of our history was rapidly coming to an end.

The good used cross-ties were bundled up and removed, but many were discarded and left scattered along the right-of-way. Many of these were salvaged by local residents for use as fence posts.

All that remains of the Possum Trot Line is a short line running from Reader to Hwy. 24. This was used to give tourists short rides, but eventually, this too was discontinued. Some of the structures can still be seen at the Hwy. 24 crossing, but have not been used since the train was discontinued.

About the time the track was taken up in the mid-1970s, International Paper Co. became interested in the old railroad bed for use as a logging road. The timber company had just purchased

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

most of the land along the route and needed a way to access the timber. I was working for them at the time and was involved in converting the railroad into a logging road.

Just before the track was removed, my supervisor and I rode one of those little railroad work cars down the track counting the number of spans across creeks and sloughs. The company agreed to purchase these spans with the stringers still intact to be used as the support for bridges for the logging road. Each span was about 10 or 12 feet in length. Some bridges were only one or two spans, but one was 27 spans in length across a wide wet area in Caney Creek bottom. This was all pretty exciting for me since it was a diversion from our regular type work.

The timber company put treated bridge planks on these stringers and had a ready made logging road. This logging road went in both directions from the Lackland Springs crossing. Many of these bridges were later replaced with large culverts since many of the pole supports of the old railroad became rotten and were no longer safe. Most of the railroad right-of-way not used for the logging road has now grown up in brush. A few years ago, the main railroad line from Gurdon to Camden was also dismantled.

In 1985, the Reader Railroad was used in the filming of the television mini-series called *The North and the South*. This brought more famous stars to the town of Reader like Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, and Patrick Swayze. Some buildings were constructed for use in the film. These still stand at the Hwy. 368 crossing in Reader.

The Reader Railroad is not completely dead. The current owners have just put up a new web site (<http://readerrailroad.com>) where you can view pictures of the train and even a video of the train in operation. The owners are still making the old steam engines available for use in movies when needed. According to the web site, the train has been used in 16 movies and television series including *3:10 to Yuma*, *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, *There Will Be Blood*, *The North and the South*, *Appaloosa*, and *Boxcar Bertha*. The engines and passenger cars are transported by truck to wherever they are needed.

There is something about a steam train that excites many people--both young and old. I am thankful for the memories I have of the Reader Railroad and the part it played in the history of Nevada County.

NOTES REGARDING PLACES SHOWN ON MAP

Terrapin Neck – Official name is New Hope, but is known locally as Terrapin Neck. The New Hope church still exists. There is some evidence of an old cemetery directly behind the church. There was also a school here until it was consolidated with Bluff City in 1929.

Lyda – An old community. A post office by this name existed there from 1902-1908. An old cemetery with one or two markers exists at the edge of the highway near this location.

Reader – small town where the Possum Trot Line intersected with the main railroad. A small part of the town is in Nevada County, but most is in Ouachita County.

Sayre – An old community on the main railroad line. The railroad has been dismantled. This community does not exist today as an official town.

Reader Railroad – Shown in red on the map. Known as the Possum Trot Line.

Bluff City – One of the oldest communities in Nevada County. Population today is less than 200.

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Barham – An old community that no longer exists. It was located near the intersection of Hwys. 24 and Hwy. 368. It had a post office at one time.

Cummings Spring – A water stop on the Possum Trot Line. Members of the Cummings family still live nearby.

Lackland Crossing – Point where the Possum Trot Line crossed the Lackland Springs Rd. Lackland Springs was a well known resort area for many years. Lackland had a post office from 1888-1907 as well as a school, church, and store.

Gum Grove – Originally a post office called Lone Grove from 1858-1866. A school was located here until about 1929. A Church of Christ was located here until 1980. Nothing remains.

Sayre Lumber Co. railroad – This railroad is even older than the Reader Railroad.

Goose Ankle – An old community known officially as Rocky Hill. See last month's issue for pictures of Rocky Hill Methodist Church.

Ebenezer – An old community that dates back to about 1850. A school and Methodist church were once located here. A large cemetery is all that remains.

Foss – An old community. It had a post office from 1896-1917. Nothing remains.

Theo – An old community named for Theodore Gulley. It had a post office from 1904-1935 as well as a small school and a couple of churches. Nothing remains.

Zama – Community with store and a post office (1887-1909). Nothing remains.

Dill's Mill – Location of large saw mill (see article). Some evidence of the saw mill remains if you know where to look.

Morris – Had a post office from 1893-1909. A Baptist church and cemetery is located there. It is known locally as Caney. Once had a school and a Nazarene church.

Possum Trot – An old community with a school. Nothing remains. The namesake for the Possum Trot Line

Cale – Small community (population less than 100) that still exists. Post office dates from 1901.

Washington-Camden Rd. – One of the main roads from Camden to Washington, Arkansas in the 1800s.

Carolina – Site of the Carolina Methodist church which still stands, but has not been used in many years. It is one of the oldest churches in this area and is on the list of historic places. It is located on the old Washington-Camden road. A community known as Caney was nearby (not to be confused with the Caney at Morris). It had a post office from 1850-1906.

Ames – A point where the Possum Trot Line crossed the Camden-Rosston highway. Named for George Ames, a prominent oil man when oil was discovered in the area

Waterloo – The southern terminus of the Possum Trot Line. The town developed almost overnight in the 1920s when oil was discovered there. Post office dates from 1927-1971.



Thanks to all who tried to identify this object from last month's issue. The original picture was taken horizontally. I didn't want to make it too easy for you. Answers I received included: sand castles on a beach, stalagmites on the floor of a cave, wood damaged by termites, high rises in an ant hill, sand formations built by a well sun-burned family, and a landscape made of sand castles. Three people had the correct answer.

Actually, it is a piece of split wood taken from a tree that was growing on my family's farm near Bluff City. Most folks in our part of the country call it a Tickle Tongue tree. Other names are Toothache Tree and Hercules Club. The "bumps" on this particular piece are more prominent than most.

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

It is said the Indians used this tree for several medical problems. They chewed the bark which numbed the mouth and relieved tooth ache. They boiled the leaves and made a medicine for arthritis and rheumatism.

It is a rather unusual tree that does not get very tall. This particular one was about six inches in diameter near the ground and this piece was taken from the bottom portion of the tree. The bumps were much smaller a few feet from the ground.

Next assignment: This is from the label of a bottled soft drink that was popular when I was growing up. Can you put the correct name of this soft drink in the blank?

AMERICA'S FINEST KOLA

BIGGEST THIRST VALUE UNDER THE SUN

AN UNUSUAL OBITUARY (from the 10-25-1936 issue of *The Prescott Daily News*)

Magnolia, Oct. 25--Mrs. Margaret Dennis, age 91, who was pronounced dead by two physicians 52 years ago, and whose grave was dug, but who regained consciousness and lived to tell of "cheating the grave" succumbed today at her home 10 miles northwest of Magnolia. She was injured in a fall three weeks ago, and this is believed to have hastened her death.

On every Decoration Day since 1883, when Mrs. Dennis had been believed dead for several days, the grave that was dug for her has been decorated. She personally saw that this annual event was not neglected. After she had recovered from the illness that was believed to have caused her death, Mrs. Dennis assisted in refilling the grave.

During the past few years, Mrs. Dennis had occupied her time with knitting and crocheting. She made more than a dozen bedspreads the past two years.

Mrs. Dennis was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William Frazier. Mr. Frazier built the old Colonial home on the spot where the first Columbia county seat was located, in the Frog Level community. The seat of government subsequently was moved to Magnolia. The old Frazier home, built in 1853, still stands.

Mrs. Dennis is survived by three sons, Clint, John, and Hammond Dennis; a daughter, Mrs. Sallie Thraikill; and a brother, Lee Frazier. All live at or near Waldo. Funeral services will be held at 11 a.m. at Shiloh.

A news item from *The Prescott Daily News* (9-3-1910)

A dusky damsel of the lewd order was taken in tow last night by Marshal Johnson and placed in the jail where she languished during the night. She was turned out this morning and given hours to leave town.

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Here is how Prescott celebrated the Fourth of July 100 years ago (as reported in *The Nevada News in 1908*)

The Fourth in Prescott was very quiet. During the early hours of the morning, there was considerable stir by parties getting off to the many points of attraction, and trade for a short while was active. But after 10 o'clock a quietness fell over the town that reminded one of Sunday and from that hour until the evening trains began to arrive, there was nothing doing in town. The principal points of interest were: Boughton, where the Masonic lodge gave a barbecue and picnic which was attended by several hundred of our people; the Sunday school picnic given by the Christian church at Providence, to which the entire membership was present beside a number of others; a picnic at McIntosh's Bluff attended by a dozen or more of Prescott's leading young ladies and gentlemen; Texarkana where fifty or more witnessed the grandest celebration ever given by a city of that size in the south.

Besides numerous fishing parties of from two to six, who dotted the river, bayous, lakes, and creek banks of this section, all through the day returning in the evening late with a fine showing for their efforts. It is said that the fish caught on Saturday was the greatest number ever caught in any one day in this vicinity.

And the few who remained at home either lounged about the house all day, enjoying a brief rest, or took the occasion for one in which to catch up with some delayed work that the activities of routine duty had previously prevented.

But throughout it all there was a spirit of saneness that made the day one of unusual enjoyment, entirely devoid of the mishaps and unpleasant incidents which have heretofore characterized our Fourths.

PEPPER RELISH (a canning recipe from 1927)

12 red peppers
12 onions
12 green peppers
1 pint vinegar
1 tablespoon salt
1 pint water
2 cups sugar

Remove seeds from peppers and run them through food chopper with coarse blade or cut with scissors. Peel onion and chop likewise. Cover with boiling water and let stand for 10 minutes. Mix together spices, sugar, vinegar, and water and cook for five minutes. Note: (recipe did not list any spices other than salt--??) Drain pepper and onions and add vinegar solution. Boil 10 minutes and pack in sterilized jars. Process for 15 minutes.