

# **THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE**

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## **SCHOOL DAYS REMEMBERED**

One of my readers suggested that I write about some of my memories of my school days in Prescott. My memory of those days is getting dim since so much time has passed and I have filed those memories away into the “seldom used” category of my brain’s filing cabinet.



I first came to the Prescott schools in the third grade after the consolidation of the Bluff City School into the Prescott system in the fall of 1951. I even had the same teacher for the first three grades (Mrs. Maude Loe). My third grade was at the primary school in Prescott which was located not far from where the new library now stands.

**Prescott Primary School—Erected 1936 (picture from the 1958 *Wolf Trail* yearbook)**

I still have my first and second grade report cards from Bluff City and several report cards from the Prescott schools. We were given our report cards at the end of each reporting period and were required to have them signed by our parents and return them to school. Besides our academic grades in those early grades, we were graded on other things such as: gets along well with others, learning self-control, is dependable, is orderly, uses property with care, begins work promptly, follows directions, works willingly, etc. In later years, they just gave us a grade for "citizenship" which was usually marked as satisfactory or unsatisfactory.



**Park Elementary School—Erected 1928 as Prescott Junior High School. In 1945, the name was changed to Park Elementary School. (picture from the 1958 *Wolf Trail* yearbook)**

My fourth, fifth, and sixth grades were at a building near the city park called Park Elementary. I remember having Mrs. Dildy, Mrs. Johnson, and Mrs. Lela Hayes for teachers during those grades. Mrs. Dildy was one of my favorite teachers. I remember Mrs. Beulah Johnson as being a strict teacher. She had even taught my parents, so she had been around for some time. It’s funny how some teachers stand out in our memories and others just seem to have faded away as time passed. I don’t remember much about Mrs. Hayes, but she was my teacher in the sixth grade.

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**Prescott Junior High School—Erected in 1950 (picture from the 1958 yearbook)**

The seventh and eighth grades met at what was then called the junior high school close to the high school campus. Teachers I remember from those days include Mrs. Gann and Mrs. Guy Loe. One incident from those days comes to mind. It seems some boys had come across some dynamite caps left over from previous construction and had them in their possession. I remember everyone being called into the cafeteria to be searched. Those were the days boys wore their blue jeans too long and rolled up the legs to form a cuff. We all had to unroll the cuffs as they searched for any of the dynamite caps. I don't think I would have known what a dynamite cap looked like, but I know the school officials were just doing their job trying to keep us safe.

Every so often Mrs. Max Kitchen would visit the school. She was the county health nurse and we knew when we saw her coming that we would usually get some sort of shot in our arms. I can remember one time when we rode to the health office on the school bus to receive our shots.



**This picture is from the 2-14-1941 issue of *The Prescott Daily News*. A remodeling project had just been completed as a WPA project. About 500 people were present at the dedication to hear speeches and inspect the building. The band played several numbers and 28 girls modeled dresses they had made in home-ec. class.**

In the ninth grade, we moved to the high school building, even though the ninth grade was considered part of junior high at that time. The freshmen had to be initiated. Each freshman was assigned to a senior and had to dress according to the senior's instructions and pretty much be a slave to that senior for one day. I wrote about these initiations in an earlier issue several years ago.

Since we were now in high school, we were supposed to be acting a little more mature, and most of us did. However, there were a few who tried the teacher's patience. Some tried to challenge the teacher's authority and some just seemed to want attention. In every large group, there are extroverts and introverts and all stages in between. I was more of an

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introvert and I think my teachers would say I was a pretty good kid--not the smartest or the dumbest, but somewhere in between.

One of the big changes for us in high school was having a locker assigned to each student with our own combination lock. It was a small private space we could call our own for the whole school year.

I remember many of my high school teachers including Mrs. Robey, Mrs. Gordon, Mrs. Buchanan, Mrs. Tippitt, Mrs. Anderson, Mrs. Craig, Mr. Scott, Mrs. Lynn, Mrs. Purtle, Mrs. Blackshare, our librarian, and Mr. Kenneth Ledbetter, our principal.

Corporal punishment was still used as I was going to school. Occasionally we would hear the sounds of the paddle being used--a good incentive to not get too far out of line. Most of this was done out in the hall out of sight of the other students, but I can remember a few cases when it was done in front of the class. Discipline of students has been around ever since schools began and is necessary to keep order in the classroom. I'm not sure the verdict is in yet on the modern methods of discipline. From what I hear from present-day teachers, the problems are worse these days. In my day it was minor offenses that caused the problems. As far as I know, there were no drugs in our schools and no problems with school shootings. There might be a fist-fight now and then, but nothing the teachers couldn't control. We didn't need a policeman assigned to our school like many schools these days.

I remember having quite a bit of homework in high school, but I usually got mine done during study hall so I would have free time at night to watch TV. In some courses we had special projects like our science fair projects. I remember one time I couldn't come up with an idea for a science fair project and Mrs. Purtle gave me the project of feeding birds different color food to see if they preferred one color over another. I took chops (ground-up corn used for chicken feed) and colored it with food coloring, placed it in jar lids, and waited for the birds to eat. I think my experiment proved that the birds would eat anything that resembled food if they were hungry--no matter what the color. We also had to do our insect collections, getting points for each order of insects we collected. I remember needing a flea for my collection. I checked all the dogs and cats and could find no fleas, so I took the stinger from an ant and put Scotch tape over it and called it a flea. Nobody ever knew the difference. I also remember at some point having to memorize the Gettysburg Address. I wonder if they still do that in school.

We also had student teachers from time to time. We always enjoyed getting them since they were closer to our age. I remember when several of the boys decided to take Mrs. Craig's typing class. Many of the boys culled typing back then thinking it was mainly a course for girls who planned on being secretaries. I never did learn to type at any great speed, but I'm thankful I took the course. Otherwise, you wouldn't be reading this paper. One time we got a real nice looking female student teacher for typing class. I can remember the boys raising their hands during the typing exercises just so Miss \_\_\_\_ (can't remember her name) would come over to help them. They didn't really need any help, but just wanted some special attention from the nice looking student teacher.

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I was shy in those days and still am to some extent. I never wanted to be the center of attention. I remember that we had to give book reports in English class. Some of these were written reports, but some were oral reports to be delivered in front of the class. Our teacher had a rule that we could give an oral or a written report, but we could not get a higher grade than a “C” if we did not give the oral book report, no matter what our grade average might be in our other work.

Everyone has their favorite subjects. Math was my poorest subject. I only took the basic math courses and avoided any of the exotic courses like geometry. I took algebra I in the ninth grade and algebra II in my senior year. By that time we had forgotten all we had learned and had to start over. I think we only covered about 100 pages in our algebra II textbook. I guess if a person wanted to be an engineer, he might need those courses, but I never figured out how algebra would help me in later life.

That reminds me of the story of the farmer’s son who went away to college. The farmer had always given his horse commands like “Whoa”, “Gee” and “Haw” while plowing which worked fine. The horse understood what the farmer wanted and acted accordingly. One day the farmer’s son returned from college and decided to help his father with the plowing. Everything went fine until he reached the end of the first row. Instead of using the old commands his father used, the boy said, “Halt, pivot, and proceed!” The horse was thoroughly confused.

I rode the school bus to school the whole twelve years. Some of the most interesting things happened on the school bus and the 25 mile ride to and from school was one of the highlights of our day. I left home at 7:10 a.m. and arrived back home about 4:15 p.m. I remember one time when our bus driver had so much trouble with the kids that he assigned seats on the bus. At that time the boys sat on one side of the bus and the girls on the other.

Since I lived so far from Prescott, I was not involved in any extra-curricular activities which would require another trip back to town. One trip per day was enough. Things like band practice, football practice, or rehearsal for school plays were not practical for students living in the rural areas. Most students did not have cars to drive in those days.

Most of the boys took agriculture in high school and the girls took home economics. Mr. Sidney Forester was our agri. teacher and Mrs. Haltom was the home-ec. teacher. One time they decided to let the boys and girls switch for about two weeks. The girls tried their hand at a wood-working project and the boys learned to cook. That was an interesting change of pace.

We learned in agri. class about various hand and power tools. One of our first projects was to cut a twelve inch wide board into a perfect square using a hand saw. We first tried a 12-inch square. If that didn’t work, we tried a 11-inch square and so on until we got it perfect (or ran out of wood). We then advanced to other small projects like towel racks, knife racks, and broom racks. We also had our FFA meetings since we were members of the Future Farmers of America. We learned parliamentary procedure in these meetings. I remember the Sentinel was always “stationed by the door”. I wonder sometimes how many

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of us actually became farmers in later life (very few, I'm sure).

One of the highlights of our FFA was the annual trip to the state fair at Little Rock on Saturday. We would leave very early and get back after dark. We would spend our money on the various carnival games and attend the rodeo which at that time featured such stars as Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, and Annie Oakley. For a country boy from Bluff City, a trip to Little Rock was like going to New York City and to actually see a well known TV star in person was something special.

The agriculture building had some ping-pong tables and on rainy days we could gather there during the lunch hour and play ping-pong. On sunny days, we stayed outside and usually divided into small groups to talk or kill time until time for the next class.

I remember one thing that seems strange these days. Sometimes during lunch hour, a group of boys would gather down behind the agriculture building and play stretch. Two guys would stand facing each other about five feet apart and take turns throwing a pocket knife next to the other boy's foot and he would have to move his foot to where the knife stuck in the ground. They kept stretching until they could stretch no further. If the knife stuck in the ground between your legs, you had to turn around with your feet in the same position and throw the knife backwards. I guess this game was considered off-limits even back then or we wouldn't have been down behind the agri. building. Seems like we may have had a rule against bringing knives to school with a blade over so many inches long, but I'm not sure of that. Nobody ever thought of actually hurting another student in those days.

I don't remember the lunches at school being all that bad. We paid fifteen or twenty cents a day for our lunch and could get extra milk for two cents. The milk came in small glass bottles before paper cartons were used. We also had the school store which sold candy and snacks along with school supplies. Sometimes we chose to buy something at the school store instead of eating in the cafeteria. I also remember several of us boys walking from the school all the way to the curve on Hwy. 24 to a store to get a coke and some junk food for lunch instead of eating in the cafeteria.

Many students who attended Prescott schools in those days will remember Miss Frances Thrasher, our guidance counselor who was always giving us those tests to evaluate our interests and abilities. I can still hear her as she always said, "Read the directions silently while I read them aloud."

Occasionally we would have a school assembly which we liked because we could miss one of our regular classes. We sometimes had special assemblies in which some person or group would talk to us or put on a program of some type. We also had assemblies in which one of the preachers from one of the churches in town would talk to us about spiritual things-not really trying to convert us to their religion, but just presenting good basic moral lessons. That type thing would be frowned upon these days.

Physical education class was enjoyed by most students, but I was never into sports. I wasn't very good at any of the games. When we chose sides for a team, I was usually one of

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the last chosen. I can remember when we went to PE class and changed into our tennis shoes. There was a big pile of tennis shoes and we just looked through the pile and found a pair that fit and when class was over, we piled them up for another day.

One of our coaches stands out in my memory--Coach Reginelli. When we had our touch football game or whatever we were playing in PE class, he would require the losing team to go through a belt line each day. I soon learned not to be the last one through the line.

Another coach, Coach Barnes, decided to have his PE class go through the same training as his football players. He had various types of exercises set up in the gym and we had to go through the whole set several times each day. It seems all we did was do exercises instead of play games. I guess it served the purpose of the course--physical exercise.

At the end of our high school career, our class went on a senior trip. Previous classes had gone on trips to the Gulf Coast or places like that, but our class was told we could go anywhere we wanted as long as it was in Arkansas. We ended up going on a three-day trip to Scott Valley Dude Ranch, just a few miles from the Missouri border.

Well, these are a few of my memories from my school days at Prescott. Somehow we managed to graduate (about 55 of us) and go our separate ways. Looking back, I am thankful for all our teachers at Prescott. They tried their best to educate us and if I had it to do over again, I would probably be a better student.

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## THE TRAGIC 1923 SCHOOL FIRE

*I was searching through the May 19, 1923 issue of The Prescott Daily News and came across a news story of a terrible school fire near Camden, South Carolina. The name Camden caught my eye and at first I thought it was Camden, Arkansas. Here are the basic facts of this incident from 1923. I can only imagine how this incident affected the lives of people in that community.*

Camden, SC (Charlotte Thompson community)-- About 300 people were attending a school play entitled *Topsy-Turvy* in an old two-story wooden frame school building known as Cleveland school about six miles south of Camden. A kerosene lantern was hung over the stage for light, but during the play, the lamp came loose and fell to the stage causing a fire. Some say that pine straw had been used on the stage for decoration for the play and this was easily ignited when the lamp fell. The fire spread very rapidly.

Everyone rushed to the only exit, but the stairway collapsed due to the excess weight and trapped the children, parents, and others inside the building. Some parents tossed their children from the windows and some people jumped to safety. Whole families were wiped out in this fire which is considered one of the worst school fires in history. Eleven members of the Dixon family died in the fire. A total of 76 people died in the fire, but only ten of the victims could be identified. The others were buried in a mass grave at the Beulah United Methodist church cemetery. Seventy names of victims are listed in the cemetery records of

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Beulah United Methodist Cemetery. New fire safety regulations were soon put into effect in public buildings where large numbers of people might congregate. One change is that exit doors should open to the outside instead of to the inside like those in this building.

A large solid white marker has been erected at the cemetery with the names of all the fire victims who were buried in the mass grave at Beulah United Methodist church cemetery in Kershaw Co., South Carolina. You can call up this cemetery on the Find-a-grave web site and view the names of those who died and see the large monument erected in their memory. You can also do a search for the Cleveland School fire and see pictures and interviews with descendants of victims of the fire.

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### BIDS TAKEN FOR REMOVAL OF GRAVES

This might be of interest to anyone who has relatives buried in Hempstead County, Arkansas. According to the 9-5-1941 issue of *The Prescott Daily News*, the government was advertising for bids for the removal of graves and tombstones from 13 cemeteries in the new Southwest Proving Grounds military installation north of Hope, Arkansas. All bodies were to be removed by October 15. This facility was three miles wide and fifteen miles long. About 400 families had to be relocated. If your family was affected by this, please write and tell us about it.

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**Can you identify this man?** This picture was taken at the intersection in Bluff City. The sign in the upper left corner is for the Arkansas Forestry Commission nursery with an arrow pointing down what is now Hwy. 299. The house in the background belonged to the Harveys. I can remember the sycamore trees standing alongside the road, but so far nobody had been able to identify this person.