

Jerry McKeivy's  
**SANDYLAND CHRONICLE**

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**THE POISON SPRINGS MONUMENT**



It was in 1938 that a monument was unveiled marking the Poison Springs battlefield in Ouachita County. This marker was erected by the Arkansas Centennial Commission. Several hundred people showed up for the ceremony even though it was a rainy day.

Adolph Felsenthal played a big part in securing this monument and was in charge of the unveiling ceremony. John Stinson, Jr. was the master of ceremonies. Congressman Wade Kitchens delivered the keynote address.

As part of the ceremonies, a quartet composed of R. H. Little, Hugh Hogg, S. K. Clark, and Ralph Bell sang "Tenting on the Old Camp Grounds". A detachment of the National Guard fired a salute during the program and Felix Laney played taps at the end of the ceremony.

This monument was placed at the intersection of Hwy. 24 and the road leading to the battlefield (now Hwy. 76). A few years ago, the monument was removed from that location for some reason. Have you ever wondered what happened to it or had you even missed it?

It has now been installed at the Poison Springs State Park on the side of the highway along with an earlier marker installed in 1929 by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. It could be a little confusing though, since the inscription on the marker states that the battle was "less than three miles westward" and now the marker is actually at the battle site.

The original location at the intersection of Hwy. 24 and 76 was not a good location for the marker. It is a dangerous intersection and there was no room to park a vehicle while people viewed the marker. You have to remember that in 1938 when the marker was placed, Hwy. 24

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had just been paved and probably the traffic was very light. Hwy. 76 was probably nothing more than a gravel or dirt road at that time. I suppose they thought this was the best location since it was on the main highway and only three miles from the battlefield. It is hard to imagine a crowd of several hundred people gathered at that location in the rain listening to speeches, prayers, and music but that's how it was reported in the newspaper in July, 1938.

Here is the inscription on the five foot tall marker which is now at Poison Spring State Park.

*The Poison Springs battle ground, less than three miles westward, was the scene of an important action contributing to the retreat of the Federal army under General Steele from Camden and south Arkansas to Little Rock. A surprise attack by the Confederates April 18, 1864, caused serious loss to the Northern forces in men, needed food supplies, and livestock with only slight loss to the Southern forces. It immediately preceded the very bloody battle at Jenkins Ferry on the Saline River.*

*1836 Arkansas Centennial Commission  
Arkansas History Commission 1936*



At the top of the centennial marker is this inscription. If anyone knows what this means, let me know.



The 1929 marker installed by the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

I am sorry to report that Mrs. Mary Kate Sawyer Morgan Roberson, age 99, of Stephens passed away Feb. 14, 2010. I interviewed Mrs. Roberson in 2007. The interview is in the December, 2007 issue of *The Sandyland Chronicle*.

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## WHEN DOCTORS MADE HOUSE CALLS

Back in the old days most communities of any size had a country doctor who traveled by buggy or horseback to wherever his services were needed. The doctor was not usually summoned until the old home remedies were tried first unless it was a real emergency like an accident, a gunshot, or a serious illness.

According to old newspapers, the little town of Bluff City had four doctors in 1912. Doctors were located at places like Theo, Cale, Rosston, Willisville, Bodcaw, Glenville, and other small towns in Nevada County as well as in Prescott, the county seat. With that many doctors scattered about, medical help was available within a few miles for those who could afford it. I've heard stories about how doctors were sometimes paid with farm produce if the patient couldn't afford to pay cash. Maybe I should ask my doctor if he would accept a bushel of peas or a couple of watermelons for payment.

I've heard some of the older folks in my family talk about using Dr. Everett Shell for a doctor. Dr. Shell lived from 1871 to 1938 and practiced medicine at Theo, a small community south of Bluff City. One of the earliest country doctors I remember was Dr. Rushing at Chidester. A trip to the doctor in the 1950s usually meant a shot of penicillin. Penicillin was a relatively new drug at that time and doctors would give a penicillin shot for just about any ailment from an ear infection to a bad cold. Another favorite were the sulfa drugs. These powerful drugs gave those early doctors another option in the treatment of many diseases and saved countless lives.

I was growing up just about the time doctors quit making house calls. I can remember Dr. Charles Hesterly making a call to our home when one of my grandparents was sick. The early Hesterlys and the McKelvys were related by marriage, so my family used Dr. Jake Hesterly and his son, Dr. Charles Hesterly most of the time. They had an office at Prescott across the street from the Cora Donnell Hospital at the time, but would come out to the home if needed and we lived twenty miles from town.

Dr. Charles Hesterly drove a Chevrolet Corvaire (remember those??). It had the engine in the rear and I can remember him opening the hood of the car and getting his medical bag out one time when he came to our house about 1960. The strangest thing I remember was the time he came in the kitchen where supper was cooking and lifted the lids on the pots to see what was cooking and checked our stock of medicine we had in the kitchen cabinet. My mother had a few words to say about that after he had left.

One day some neighbors stopped at our house. The lady was very sick and it was decided she needed a doctor. Dr. Charles Avery from Prescott was called. My job was to go to the store in Bluff City and lead him out to our house. Those were the only house calls by doctors that I remember. I can see why doctors stopped making house calls. They might spend all day going in several different directions and still not see very many patients.

One of the major traumatic experiences of my childhood was the time I was running and sliding barefoot on our long front porch which had wooden flooring. A huge splinter became

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lodged in the bottom of my foot. Since it was too deep to easily remove, an old home remedy was tried first. A biscuit poultice was prepared. I'm not sure what ingredients were used, but the main ingredient was biscuit dough. It was wrapped around my foot and was supposed to draw out the splinter. I guess it was too deep for this home remedy to work, because after a few days, I ended up having to go to the doctor in Prescott to get the splinter removed. I remember the doctor giving me a small plastic box which contained the splinter so I could show it to my friends.

If an accident happened in the 1950s and 1960s which required medical help, most people just loaded the patient in the family car or truck and headed for town. I remember us making a few flying trips to Prescott like the time my brother got snake bit, the time he swallowed a penny, and the time when my mother got shot by a young boy while she was picking cucumbers. Another time we had to rush a young girl to the doctor because she had almost severed a finger in a car door. We didn't have a telephone in those days or a 911 emergency system and I don't remember anybody ever calling for an ambulance back then. I'm not sure if Prescott even had an ambulance at that time. Although we were about the same distance from Prescott and Camden, we usually went to Prescott, probably because that's where our doctor practiced.

The most serious incident I remember was in 1953 when we had just concluded a family get-together in the Goose Ankle community. The family of Bennie Green had just left for home and some of the children were riding behind the cab of his log truck. His seven year-old son, Michael, fell off and was run over by the rear wheels of the truck. They rushed back to where we were gathered and we knew from their screaming that something terrible had happened. My father drove Mr. Green and the injured boy to Prescott, but it was no use. The young boy died on the way to Prescott. It was a tragic ending to an otherwise enjoyable day. It also happened to be my birthday.

Sometime about 1960, I remember going to see Dr. Charles Hesterly in his office at Prescott. Unlike today, he would sometimes spend thirty minutes with a patient. A patient these days is lucky to get five minutes with a doctor. He even typed up the prescription himself in the exam room while I waited. I remember him using the "hunt and peck" system when typing and I remember thinking that I could type better than he could. I got my prescription and headed up to Hesterly Drug Store, operated by Berry Hesterly, to get the medicine.

If any of you have some memories you would like to share about country doctors or unusual home remedies your family used, let me know and I'll include them in a future issue.

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*James Hairston sent me this story from his childhood which fits in with the above article on doctors making house calls.*

My sister Ruth and I were adopted by our beloved parents, Dr. Glenn and Mrs Wava Hairston, back in November, 1948. Ruth and I were not infants by any means; rather, we were 4 3/4 years and 3 3/4 years old, respectively, me being the elder.

It didn't take Dad very long to invite us to accompany him on various house calls (yeah!

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The "good old days"!), both within Prescott and relatively far from home, i.e., Bluff City, Cale, Delight, Blevins, Rosston, Gurdon, Chidester, Camden, and other exotic places I fail to recall. We loved those trips, until we arrived at our destination, that is. If there weren't any children with whom to play, we were ordered to remain in the car, with NO excuses for exiting same!

Anyway, I said all that to say this: Once, our parents decided to take a long-deserved trip to Hot Springs for a day (horse races). While they were gone, our nanny, Opal Hamilton, a loving, rather tall, large black lady whom we both loved dearly, was to care for us. Opal got wrapped up in her household chores and I decided to take Ruth and make a *house call*! I proceeded to wrap her up in one of her warmest coats, while I decided it was too hot for a coat and went bare shirted! Off we drove on our tricycles toward the railroad tracks in the center of town. Somehow, we managed to cross the tracks, go across Highway 67, and proceed on down the street, right past the City Police station and past the Prescott Grammar School and gym. We continued on, to a point almost to DeAnne Cemetery, when a very excited black lady appeared on her front porch and began to inquire as to just who we "belonged to" (I later found out, she knew!)! I tried to ignore her, as we still had such a long way to go! With the assistance of a couple other folks over there, we were convinced that we really had no business riding our trikes down the middle of the street, no matter where we intended to go! We turned around and headed back, going exactly the way we came, with a rather long break in our adventure...to ride across a wooden bridge (sidewalk) time and time again!

We eventually arrived back at the main intersection of Highway 67 and a main street (runs past the old Nevada Theater and I can't recall its name). To our pleasant surprise, we were met there by Opal, BOTH city policemen, and a few other well-wishers! Our happiness to see Opal soon turned to surprise and confusion, especially when she administered a long willow branch she had procured along her panic-stricken search to find us...to MY feet and legs! I learned years later, Ruth was deemed too young to understand her miss-doings, while I, on the other hand, was the "ring-leader" and knew the errors of my ways! We were exiled to our rooms and were denied radio (TV wasn't affordable quite yet) or any toys we wanted until bed time.

In those days, our parents' bedroom was located in the what-later-became our den, with a door to the garage. I decided, with Opal in such a foul and menacing mood, I'd be well-advised to at least feign sleep until Mom and Dad got home. Well, once they arrived, Opal told them of my dastardly deed...right there in that room! I continued to pretend being asleep...right up to the point of being administered the *first* spanking by our Dad, the first of many thereafter, admittedly ALL of which I thoroughly deserved! I decided right there and then not to make any more plans to go on a house call without my Daddy being with me!

Hope this brought a chuckle! Of course, times were very different back then. Folks didn't fear much mischief. Robberies, assaults, and/or murders were almost non-existent in Prescott and the surrounding towns. We would be mortified if any of our kids tried that deed in today's environment! I often imagine the Good Lord, or one of His appointed angels hovering over my little sister and me throughout our little adventure! I still feel a little guilt over causing so many folks so much grief back on that fateful day in March, 1949!

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## SINGING SCHOOL

By Betty Thomas

In the middle of the summer when it got really hot, it was time for “ Singing School ”. In our community it occurred after Mr. Aubrey Barlow “laid by” his crops and had time to teach it. His wife “Miss” Leila was an equal partner in the effort to teach the youth of the surrounding area the basics of music. I recall my legs sticking to the seats of the school auditorium while I was learning one shaped note from another and trying to make sense of sharps and flats. Even though it was hot it was a chance to see friends during the summer and a chance for me to visit my grandparents and aunt and uncle who lived in Bluff City .

The latest Stamps Baxter song book was our “textbook” and my copy of A. J. Showwalter’s *Practical Rudiments and Music Reader* is in my piano bench even today. Mr. Aubrey led the class in singing the new songs while Miss Leila played the piano and we thought we all sounded great. Mr. Aubrey was strong on pronouncing all the syllables in the song words and I cringe when I hear pop singers slurring their words.

The group was divided during one part of the day. The older students were taught music theory by Mr. Aubrey and the younger were taught scales and simple chords. I remember being “promoted” and enjoying learning the “advanced” techniques.

I recall the “ear” training we had in the afternoons. Miss Leila would play notes on the piano and we were to write down what we heard. I always heard “do, mi, sol” regardless of what was played. Fortunately, we did not receive report cards or my grades would have been dismal. Mr. Aubrey would encourage us to listen to the differences in the notes; they all sounded alike to me. We all had to take turns “leading” the singing and I dreaded my turn for I have about as much natural rhythm as a rock. Some of the teenagers did really well and I can remember admiring their grace as they beat the time with their arms.

During the school year the following year, the schoolhouse burned and the next singing school I recall was held in the old Church of Christ building. Because there is no instrumental music used in the services of the Church of Christ, Miss Leila’s piano was transported to the building. It was memorable to me because I remember going down the hill behind the church to the spring for water to drink and being as thirsty when I got back up the hill as I was when I started. I also remember that someone from the community died and singing school was halted for the funeral services. The piano was rolled to the side of the pulpit and decked with the funeral floral arrangements. The singing school class sang for the funeral and after the casket was rolled from the building, the classes were resumed.

The culmination of the singing school was a program presented to the community on a Friday night. There were quartets, trios, and duets formed from the classes along with the whole group’s singing. Everyone had something to do that presented his or her musical knowledge. I cannot remember having been embarrassed by whatever I had to do for I did enjoy trying to sing and I remember really liking to participate.

I owe my love and knowledge of music to those two people, Mr. Aubrey and Miss Leila

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Barlow. (She gave me piano lessons during seventh grade—I can read music, count time, and find the notes on the piano, just not all at the same time.) They did their best to teach us how to sing and for most of those involved it worked. You can't do much with someone who has a tin ear and no sense of rhythm, though.

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Little flecks of powder  
And a little spread of paint  
Makes a girl's complexion  
Look like what it ain't.

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This is the grave marker for “Old Mike” at DeAnn Cem. at Prescott. It's a little hard to read, but the name on the marker is “Mike” with the death date of 1911. There is no birth date because it is unknown.

The unidentified man known as “Mike” was found dead in the city park in Prescott in 1911. He was embalmed by Cornish Funeral Home and his body was kept at the mortuary in hopes that his identity could be determined. After 64 years with nobody claiming his body, the state ordered the funeral home to bury the body. In 1975, Mike was laid to rest in a cemetery plot purchased by the funeral home. I assume the funeral home also provided this simple grave marker.

I have previously written about “Old Mike”. See the March, 2003 and the May, 2004 issues for more information on this story.

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## BLUFF CITY IN 1913

*This article appeared in the January, 1913 issue of The Nevada News.*

Bluff City is situated in the southwestern part of Arkansas in the northeastern part of Nevada County about four miles southwest of Sayre, the nearest railroad point.

The people are of a high class of citizenship. They are refined, intelligent, moral, and law abiding. They are noted for their sociability and hospitality to strangers. All who have visited our town have expressed themselves as being highly pleased with the genial treatment accorded them while here.

The educational advantages of Bluff City are excellent. In the school at this place, scores of young people are preparing for the duties of life. Prof. Dawson, with those assisting him, is striving to prepare pupils to be good, loyal, and intelligent citizens and consistent Christians. The practical and wholesome lessons in morality and in true manliness and politeness which are instilled in the minds of the pupils of Bluff City High School are such as will appeal to many noble instincts of boys and girls, and will inspire them to higher and more worthy plains of living.

With good cause, Bluff City might be called a town of homes. It contains more houses worthy to be called "homes" than any town its size in the state.

This, too, is a healthful place, and that is a fact worthy of consideration. The location of the town, where cooling breezes sweep the country throughout the summer, insures good health to the people within its limits. As a matter of fact, a glance at the mortuary report of the U.S. census will prove by figures that our death rate is as small as in any community its size anywhere. A good natural drainage adds to the sanitary and hygienic advantage that nature has bestowed upon our lucky town, while the water is of the very best--pure, sparkling, sweet, cool--something not found in every community.

The pulpits of our churches are always filled by men of piety and talent.

It can be said there are no very rich or very poor men here--the wealth is fairly evenly divided, and there is not that insane fight for position in social matters that makes associations unpleasant and success so uncertain, but all meet upon the broad plain of humanity.

For a man with a family there are few places superior to this, either as a home or an investment, and the man who is looking for a favorable location will do well to come and investigate our advantages.

There is a cordial welcome here for worthy persons and a home life above average can be enjoyed. All will find room for a home, and a chance to make profitable investments with their money.