

Jerry McKeiv's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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THE OLD DeWOODY SCHOOL HOUSE

At one time Nevada County had as many as 89 school districts. Small one or two room school houses dotted the landscape situated only a few miles from each other. This was necessary in the days before bus transportation of students. Most students walked to school each day and the distance walked depended on the distance from the home to the school. It was not unusual for some students to walk two or three miles to school each day.

The county was much more populated in 1920 than it is today. In fact, Nevada County had about 4,000 more people in 1920 than it has today. Most of the land was being cultivated at that time and farm families lived close to each other. Families were larger back then with as many as ten or twelve children in some families. Several families who lived near each other usually had enough children to support a small school.

These early schools sometimes had split terms. School was not in session when children were needed at home during the planting and harvesting seasons. The school term sometimes had to be shortened due to money problems. Efforts were made to pass tax increases to support the schools. Some of these passed and others failed, forcing some schools to shut down early.

These small country schools usually had less than 80 students with only two or three teachers and maybe a principal who also taught classes. The pay for teachers was low and their duties included such things as janitor work and other non-teaching activities. I have a couple of old teacher contracts from the Lackland and Gum Grove schools in 1928. The pay at that time was \$55 per month. A clause in the contract reads: "The teacher agrees to keep said school open eight hours each school day; keep carefully the register required by law; preserve from injury to the utmost of his/her power the District property; give said school his/her entire time and best efforts during the school hours; use his/her utmost influence with parents to secure a full attendance of scholars, and generally comply with all requirements of the laws of this state in relation to teachers, to the best of his/her ability."

Bluff City was the largest town in the northeastern part of Nevada County about 1928. Residents were especially proud of their high school which had been constructed in 1910. This school was a wooden structure located at the end of what is now Knight Street.

Other schools close by included Gum Grove, Theo, DeWoody, and Terrapin Neck. A large consolidation effort was made about 1928 to consolidate many of the smaller schools in Nevada County with nearby larger schools. By this time, bus transportation was available. The argument was that it would be more practical to consolidate some of these schools. Schools would have better equipment and more books. The result would be that students would receive a better education.

Consolidation of schools is always a hot topic when it happens. Many of these smaller

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communities did not want to lose their school. Gum Grove even filed a law suit trying to prevent their consolidation with Bluff City. The case went all the way up to the Arkansas Supreme Court, but in the end the consolidation was accomplished. Bluff City greatly benefited from the consolidation. The newspaper reported that a new \$100,000 school building was being constructed at Bluff City in August, 1929 to accommodate these new students. This school was a brick structure located across the road from the Bluff City Baptist church. Evidently, that location was a cotton farm at that time because a newspaper item mentioned students having blisters on their hands from pulling up cotton stalks from the school grounds.

After consolidation in 1929, the Bluff City School boasted 170 students and eight teachers. The school colors were purple and gold. The ball team was called "The Fiery Dragons". A newspaper item stated that the basketball teams had new suits and two new balls. The school library had 800 volumes according to the newspaper in 1930.

The enrollment at Bluff City School continued to increase in the 1930s. A PTA was organized, a hot lunch program was started which served at the model for the state, and a school forest was started with the students doing the planting. Literary societies were organized and school plays were presented. Subjects taught in the tenth grade included Plane Geometry, Ratios, Sine, Co-sine, and Tangent, Latin, Algebra, and Human Conduct along with the basic subjects like American History and English Literature. There was a chapter of the Future Farmers of America and the girls studied Home Economics.

The school was the center of community activities. The public turned out to watch ball games and to see music shows performed by well-known groups such as the Stamps-Baxter Quartet and The Sunshine Boys. Also popular were debates on controversial subjects such as this one in 1928: "Be it resolved: The U. S. Constitution should be amended to read: No Catholic, atheist, or evolutionist should hold any elected or appointed office in the United States."

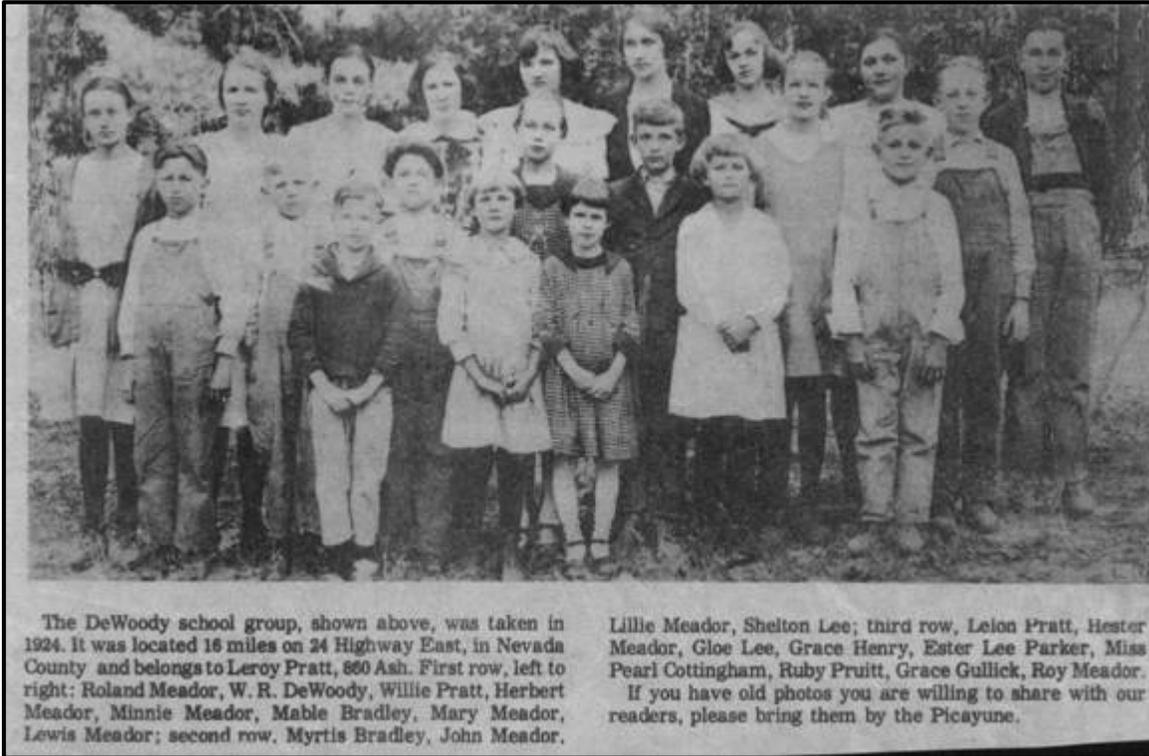
This school existed in Bluff City until 1941 when it was completely destroyed by fire. It was soon rebuilt in the same location, but another consolidation forced the school to close in 1950 and the school was merged with the Prescott district. The almost-new brick building was later sold to the Church of Christ which continues to meet in the same building today.

One of the small schools consolidated with Bluff City in 1928 was called the DeWoody School House. Several schools in Nevada County were named after a well-known family which probably owned the land where the school was located. Here is an excerpt from a speech given by Mr. Basil Munn about the history of Nevada County schools published in the January 13, 1949 issue of *The Nevada News*:

"From 1876 to 1908, Nevada County has 89 school districts. The districts usually covered a radius of about three miles from the school. They usually used creeks for district boundaries because when the creeks flooded, the students could not get across. Unusual names: Nobody knows where the name Zama came from (pronounced Zamer by local people). Another was called Lone Star. There are two Ebenezers, three Pleasant Hills, two Rocky Colleges, three Antiochs, Rock Springs, Bluff Springs, Pine Springs, Holly Springs, Siloam Springs, Cornelius

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Springs, and Lackland Springs. Forest Hill, Hickory Grove, Pine Grove, Gum Grove; family names such as Sneed's District, Waldrep, DeWoody, Mendenhall, Buchanan, Ward's Chapel, Westmoreland, Brown, Cecil, Lane Mill, Harrison, Water's Chapel, Barksdale; animal names such as Terrapin Neck and Goose Hill. By 1941, there were 41 districts after consolidation using these schools as the main schools of the county: Bodcaw, Willisville, Cale, Bluff City, Laneburg, and Prescott."



This school picture previously published in *The Nevada County Picayune* is the only picture I have found of the DeWoody School. The caption states the date was 1924. The students in the back appear to be older than those on the front row.

I recently received an email from Mr. Warren Ober, a former resident of Bluff City, who now lives in Canada. He shared some information about the DeWoody School that few people know. He gives the exact location of the school and some first-hand information on what happened to the building after the consolidation with Bluff City.

Mr. Ober writes:

"Approaching Bluff City on Highway 24 from Prescott, after the old Reader Railroad Crossing and just after you've rounded the curve, you should see on the left, roughly halfway up the hill, a still visible small clearing. This is the site of the old one-room DeWoody Schoolhouse.

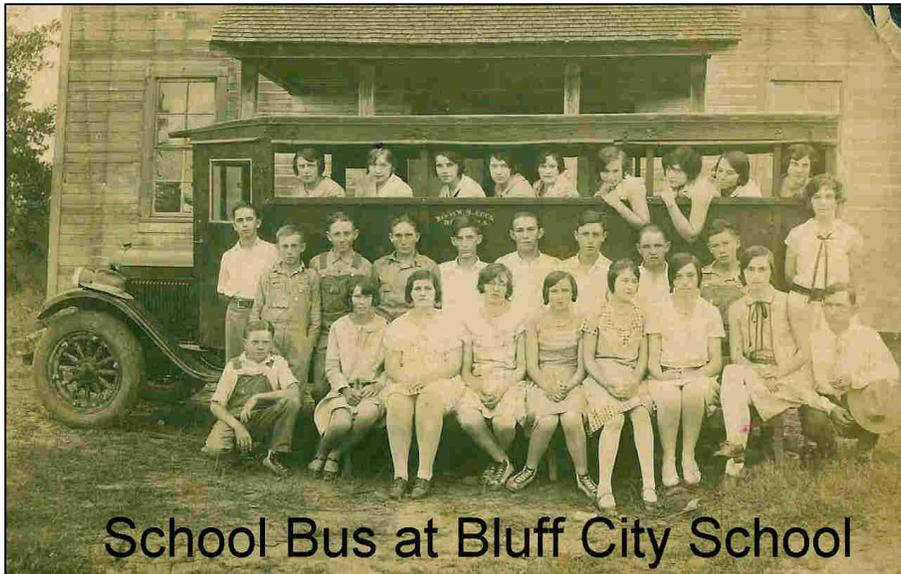
I remember spending several very enjoyable hours visiting the school during late 1928 or early 1929 in the care of a student, a very kind distant cousin of mine whose name,

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as I recall, was Nettie Jewel Meador. (If I've remembered her name incorrectly, I do apologize to her and to all concerned.) I have vivid memories of that brief visit. I can't have been more than three or four years old at the time. The patient and thoughtful teacher generously spent time with me, and I do regret that I can't remember her name.

After consolidation with the Bluff City School occurred shortly thereafter, my father, Andrew C. Ober (whose mother was Conia Meador Ober), and my mother, Delilah Upton Ober, purchased the disused Dewoody School building, had it partitioned, and, with my sister, Mesilla Jean, and me, moved there to live in 1929. My father farmed a few of the Meador acres some distance across the highway, then drove a Bluff City school bus, and finally opened a Gulf service station at the front of the old schoolhouse. My late brother, Kenneth H. (9 February 1930-29 April 2003), was, I'm reasonably sure, the first child to be born in the Dewoody Schoolhouse—and perhaps the last.”

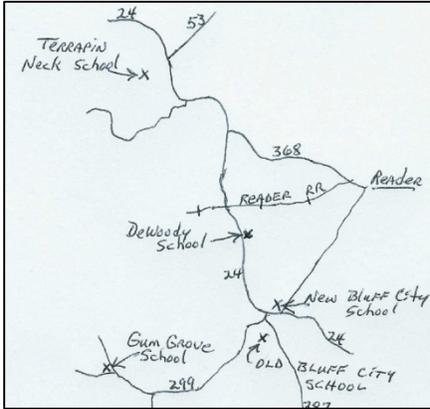
If anyone has another photo of students from the DeWoody School or a picture that shows the building, please let me know.



This is the type school bus used about the time these small schools were consolidated with Bluff City. This is the old wooden school building used until about 1930.

A newspaper item in 1928: “Three districts (# 40, #30, and # 38) have combined. A bus runs regularly from Terrapin Neck and DeWoody to Bluff City”. I’m not sure which districts these were, but I assume that two of them were Terrapin Neck and DeWoody. According to the teacher contract I have, Gum Grove was District # 60. Consolidation of the Gum Grove district with Bluff City was probably delayed a year due to the court case mentioned above.

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Here is a crude map showing the location of the schools mentioned in this article.

This distance from Terrapin Neck to Bluff City is about six miles. As you can see, there were five schools within six miles of Bluff City—six if you count Theo not shown on the map. Reader also had a school but it was mostly in Ouachita County, so that school was not involved in the consolidation with the Nevada County school.

AN INTERESTING FAMILY (from the 8-5-1908 issue of *The Daily Picayune*)

James W. Duke, the subject of this sketch, is now 71 years old. He now lives near Cale in this county, but will move to Prescott within the next few weeks. Mr. Duke came to Arkansas with his wife, Martha J., from near Atlanta, Georgia in 1871 and settled near old Mt. Moriah, Nevada Co. (then Hempstead Co.) and has never moved but once since.

They had born to them 14 children, 12 of whom are now living, 5 boys and 7 girls, as follows: Thomas H. Duke of Laneburg, Mary Shaw Buckner of Texas, J. M. Duke of Prescott, Sarah Mandy Hart of Hope, Jno. W. Duke of Prescott, Bettie and Addie Westmoreland of Cale, Geo. W. Duke of Laneburg, Minnie Rhodes of Waldo, P. Duke of Little Rock, and Lucinda Bolls of Laneburg.

Mr. Duke served 3 years in the Confederate army and was a prisoner 2 years, making 5 years of his life given to the cause. He is a rugged farmer and was always a successful one. He and his good wife are in splendid health and enjoying life.

They have 66 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren, making 84 in number, counting the two old people.

Mr. Duke contemplates coming to town and spending the rest of his life.

A PREACHER'S FAREWELL (from the 7-9-1931 issue of *The Prescott Daily News*)

A preacher had become discouraged with his work with his congregation. He was a friend of the governor, and got a political job. In taking leave of his congregation he said,

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“Brothers and sisters, I must say good-bye. I don’t think God loves you, because none of you ever die. I don’t think you love each other, because none of you ever get married. I don’t think you love me, because you have not paid my salary. Your donations are moldy fruit and wormy apples—and by their fruits, you shall know them. I am going to a better place. I will be a chaplain at the penitentiary—where I go, ye cannot yet come, but I go to prepare a place for you, and the good Lord have mercy on you. Good-bye.”

OUR NEW PET

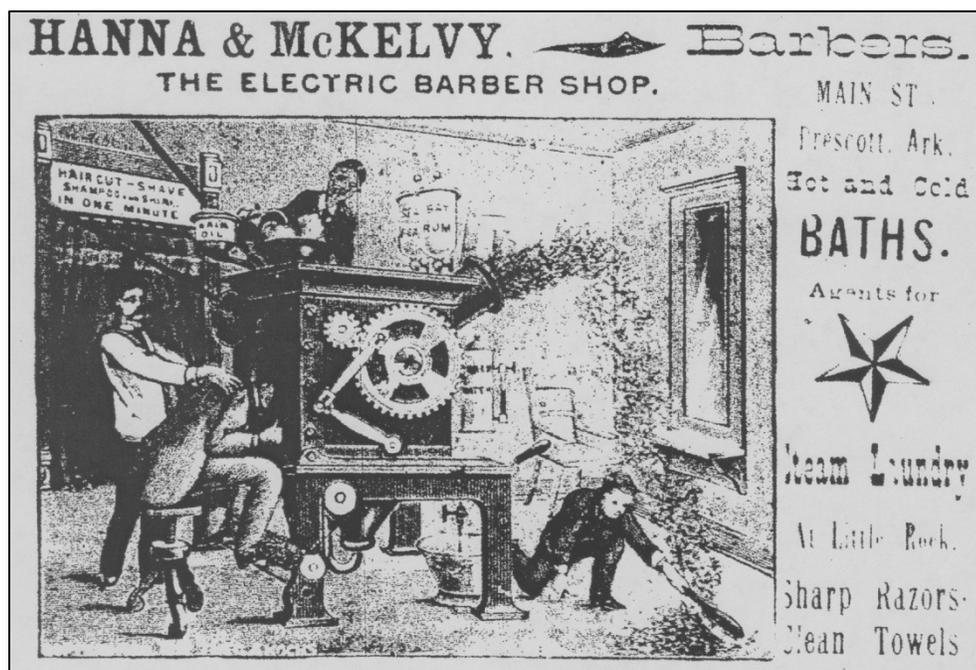


One morning a few weeks ago, I went out to get the newspaper and put out our trash. I noticed a young deer standing by our storage shed. That’s not unusual in our neighborhood since we have plenty of deer which like to eat our garden, fruit trees, and flowers. I just ignored the deer, rolled the trash buggy to the curb, and picked up the newspaper. When I came back around the house, I noticed the deer was still there. I decided to just see how close I could get to it before it ran so I slowly walked down the hill toward the deer. It just looked at me and went back to grazing. I was surprised that it didn’t run. When I got pretty close to it, I held out the newspaper in my hand and the deer slowly walked up and sniffed the paper. I had never seen a deer act like this before. After a few minutes, I started back to the house and was even more surprised when the deer followed me to our back door. We decided the deer wanted something to eat. All we had was some bird seed that had some chopped corn in it. The deer seemed to enjoy this. While my wife was busy feeding it, I went to get my camera and took a few pictures. The deer even let my wife rub its head while it ate from the bowl. Finally, the deer wandered off toward our garden and disappeared into the woods.

I don’t know if someone had been feeding this deer or if it had become so accustomed to being around people, it was not afraid. I’m glad I got the picture because it will probably never happen again. We figured the deer might come back later for more feed, but it has not been back. I noticed a few days later that a deer about that size had been hit by a car a short distance from our house. I suspect that it might have been this little deer, but we have so many around here, there’s no way of knowing for sure.

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HANNA & McKELVY'S ELECTRIC BARBER SHOP



I thought this Nevada County newspaper ad from 1910 was unusual. The man on the left with his head in the machine is getting a haircut. The man on top is pouring in hair oil. The cut hair comes out the chute on the upper right and is being swept into a pile. The sign says "hair cut, shave, and shampoo in one minute." The Hanna & McKelvy barber shop was evidently the main barber shop in Prescott at that time. I've also seen a reference that mentions the McKelvy Hotel in Prescott, probably operated by the same man.

I wondered if this McKelvy might be some of my relatives, but after some research, I can find no close connections. This was John W. McKelvey, known as "Jack", who came to Prescott with his family from southeast Missouri. He and his family are frequently mentioned in the newspapers in the early 1900s and he was one of Prescott's prominent merchants. One article refers to him as "a wealthy merchant of Prescott". I don't know who the Hanna is, but I did find that Mr. McKelvey's mother was named Hannah B. McKelvey. He is buried in the Huffman-McKelvey Cemetery in Buckhorn, Missouri.

NEVADA COUNTY 100 YEARS AGO (items from *The Nevada News* in August, 1910)

---A charter was granted to the Prescott and Reader Railway Co. for the construction of a link of railway from Prescott in Nevada Co. to Reader in Ouachita Co., a distance of 20 miles.

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---A new drug company to be known as the Red Cross Drug Store has been organized in Prescott with Ralph Moncrief, president, Arthur Westmoreland, vice-president, and Pomeroy Whitten, secretary and treasurer.

---There will be a big picnic at Lackland Springs to which everyone is invited. This picnic is for the purpose of starting a movement to build a union church at that place and to put in a Woodmen hall.

---Eggs in the local market are getting quite scarce, although the price remains firm at 15 cents per dozen.

---Mayor Andrews will accompany Marshal Johnson on a tour of inspection of the premises of the citizens of Prescott in the next few days. All places found to be foul with weeds or trash, or in any way in an unsanitary condition, will be condemned and the owner or occupant will be notified to clean up the place at once. A refusal to do so will subject the party to the penalties of law. The mayor expects to visit, without exception, every home in Prescott, as well as the business houses in the uptown district.

---A telephone has been put in at the home of Mr. Garner at Piney Grove in Boughton township for the accommodation of the people in that section.

---The present spell of dry weather is the longest Prescott has suffered in several years. The last rain fell twenty-five days ago and then only .44 of an inch fell. Less than half an inch of rain has fallen during the entire month.

---The new school house at Boughton is nearing completion.

DID YOU KNOW THIS?

Prescott High School in 1911 placed much emphasis on agriculture and domestic science. Here is a brief listing of what was taught in addition to academic subjects:

Agriculture

Freshman—Common Grains; Garden Vegetables; Livestock and Poultry.

Sophomore—Soil Physics; Swine; Dairy Cattle

Junior—Horticulture; Fruit Growing; Diseases, Spraying; Grafting

Senior—Soil Fertility; Crop Rotation

Domestic Science

Freshman—Cooking

Sophomore—Sewing

Junior—Dress making; Needlework

Senior—Advanced Cooking; House Decoration, Household Management