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## SELLING SWEET GUM

I'm sure most of you are familiar with the sweet gum tree which is very common here in south Arkansas. They are considered to be hardwood trees even though the wood is a lot softer than other hardwoods like oak or maple. The wood from smaller sweet gum trees is used like pine to make paper and the larger trees can be cut into logs and used for such things as railroad cross-ties, flooring for bridges, boxes, crates, etc.



We have a couple of sweet gum trees in our yard. Almost every time a high wind comes through, we find a limb or two that was broken off the tree. I wish they had been cut before they got so tall. Another problem with the sweet gum tree is the large number of sweet gum balls (pictured at left) they shed each year. I've yet to find a good use for them. I faintly remember using them many years ago as decorations for the Christmas tree after sticking some glitter on them.

Some of you older readers may remember using the sweet gum sap as chewing gum. I don't think I ever tried that. From what I understand, it is very sticky and hard to get off your teeth if you gather it too fresh before it has hardened enough to make good chewing gum. It was a good substitute before the days of store-bought chewing gum.

I was looking through an old Nevada County newspaper from 1930 and an article caught my eye about selling sweet gum. The article stated that it was a good way for rural boys and girls to make a little extra spending money. The article gave instructions about how to gather and pack it for shipping and offered \$1.50 per pound for it with a five pound minimum shipment.

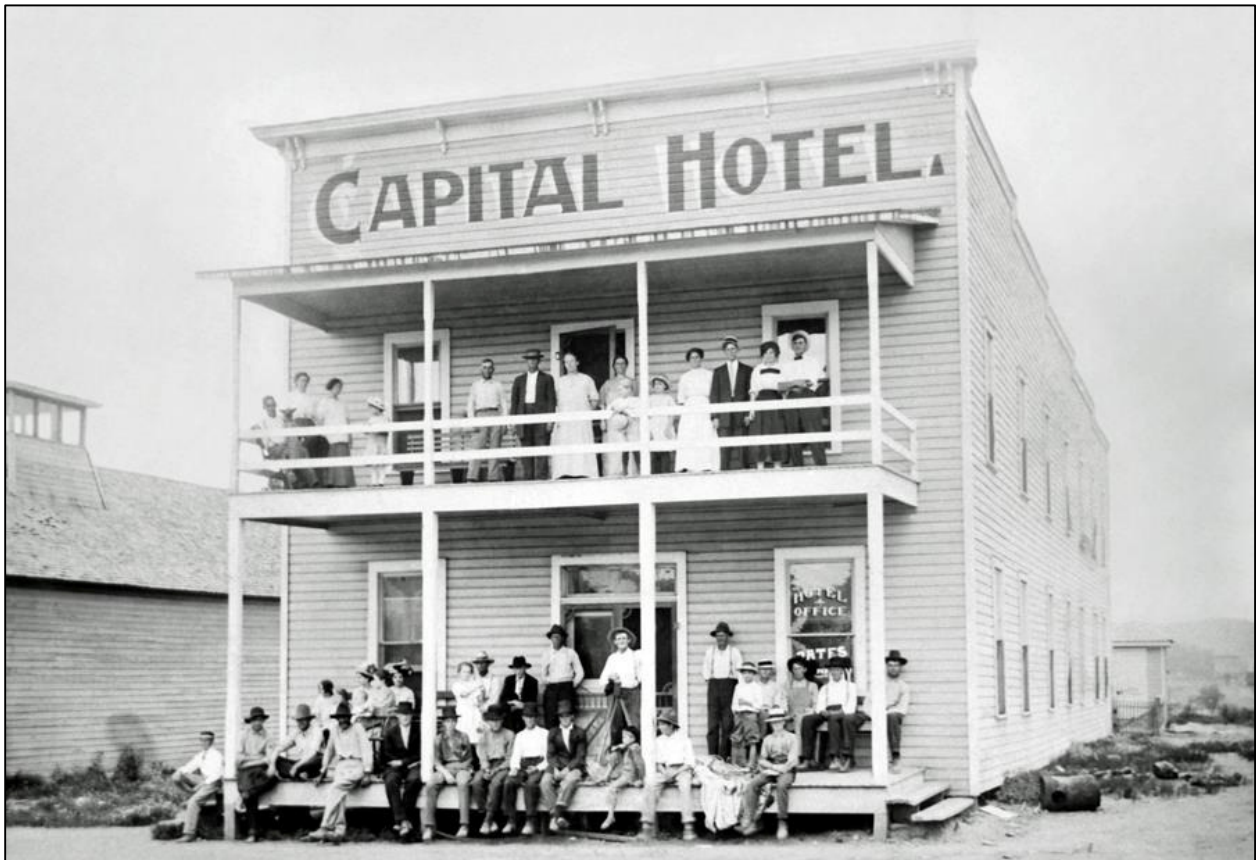
The instructions were to get a hatchet or axe and scrape off the rough bark on a narrow strip about two feet long about two feet from the ground. Then cut a narrow strip about three-fourths of an inch wide down the barked area and cut about a fourth inch deep into the sap-wood. Then cut four other short strips or grooves extending out on each side of the main groove and have those angled a little so the sap would flow into the main groove, sort of like the branches of a tree. This was done in the spring of the year as the sap was beginning to rise. About every ten days or so, the gum that had collected would be scraped off with something like a case knife being careful not to get trash in it. If you accidentally got trash in it, you could heat the gum in a container placed inside another container of water (sort of like a double boiler) and then the trash could be removed. Once most of the trash was removed, you could strain it through some cheese cloth. The article warned about using Mother's milk strainer or you might get in trouble.

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Then the sweet gum was to be packed into some sort of tin container such as a syrup bucket with a lid that could be pressed down (similar to a paint can). The instructions then said to write your name and address on the container with the weight and ship it by parcel post to the company offering to buy it. The article warned boys and girls to not let the old folks know about this or they might want to get in on the game also. The article stated, "Let us make Arkansas one of the biggest and best sweet gum producing states".

So, here are my questions for you. Have you ever heard of anyone selling sweet gum collected from sweet gum trees? Have you ever chewed sweet gum from the sweet gum tree? Do you have any ideas on uses for the dead sweet gum balls that fall from these trees each year? Send me your comments within the next week or so.

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Someone sent me this picture a few months ago. They thought this hotel might have been in Ouachita County or one of the surrounding counties. If you know anything about the Capital Hotel, please let me know. I love old pictures like this.

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### **A COLLEGE CLASS TO REMEMBER**

A student entering college sometimes faces quite an adjustment. Students are thrown in with other students from various towns, states, and even foreign countries. They are also exposed to all types of professors in their various classes. Thinking back to my college days in the mid-1960s at Southern State College in Magnolia, Arkansas, I think most of our professors were good people who did their best. Some were very strict and others were very lenient in how they conducted their classes.

I had a few professors who I thought were excellent teachers. One of my favorites was Dr. Robert Walz who taught some of the history courses I took. I was amazed how he could scratch his head and all that knowledge would come forth without him having to look at any notes. The man really knew his history.

Word usually got around as to which professors were the easiest and which were the hardest. Sometimes a student had a choice but in some cases a student was stuck with a certain professor if it was a course the student needed to take.

I had one professor who conducted his class in what I thought was a very unusual way. I was in my senior year and needed one more upper level course in social studies. I chose a course called American Constitutional Development. There were about 25 students in the class. About half of them were going into pre-law and the others were going into teaching. The professor taught the course mainly to the pre-law students and seemed to not really care about those of us who planned to become teachers.

I remember the first day I went to that class. I took my textbook and a notebook to take notes like in most other classes. As soon as we were all seated, the professor told us to take our textbooks outside the classroom and leave them by the door. He said the textbooks were for us to study at home or in the dorm, so in the future there was no need to bring the textbook to his class.

This professor was an older gentleman and a no-nonsense type of guy. The course was rather dull anyway and he lectured often on various Supreme Court cases which I didn't find too exciting. I soon began to wonder what I had gotten myself into.

As the semester went on I began to wonder when we were going to have a test. Weeks went by with no test being given. How could I remember all the stuff we had learned? At one point during the course he required each student to teach the class for that day while he sat in the back and listened. I was quite nervous when my turn came since he could be very critical and didn't mind letting us know what he thought. I remember one time he told the pre-law students that only about half of them had a chance of becoming a lawyer and the rest were just wasting their time.

I missed one of his classes one time to attend a funeral back home and I just about had to get down on my knees and beg to be allowed back into his class. He let me know that I should have cleared my absence with him before hand. I never missed another

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class after that.

It turned out that we went the whole semester in this class and never had a test. None of us knew what to expect as far as what type grade we might receive. Finally the day came for the final exam which was scheduled for two hours. We had studied a very large textbook and taken pages and pages of notes from his class lectures. We didn't know what to expect when we entered the classroom for that final exam. Would the test have multiple choice or true/false questions or would it be essay type questions? We had plenty of paper with us and plenty of pens to use. I could just imagine what might happen if my ink pen ran out of ink during the test.

The professor opened his briefcase and pulled out some pieces of paper about two inches wide and began to pass them around the room. That small piece of paper was our final exam and it contained only one question. I will never forget the question:

*Trace the development of the United States constitution from the landing of the pilgrims to the present time.*

After we got over our shock, we all began writing our answer to that question. I wrote for two solid hours on that subject and turned in my paper. Some students continued on past the two hours. I was just glad to get this class behind me and hoped for the best as far as a grade was concerned.

All I can say is that I managed to pass the course. I think it was the most difficult course I took in college. I don't remember much about what I learned, but I will never forget this very strict professor and how he conducted his class. And I will never forget that final exam question which was the only test for the whole semester. I still have my textbook containing over 1000 pages. I don't think I've opened it but once or twice in the last fifty years. I suppose it would be a good book to read if I had a case of insomnia or I could always use it as a doorstop.

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### **PRESCOTT HARDWARE CO.**

I reported recently about the vacant Prescott Hardware building and the dilemma of the city council about what to do with the structure. The Prescott Hardware dates back to 1890. *The Nevada News* had a story about the hardware in its October 17, 1934 issue and the facts below are taken from that article.

Eight gentlemen with a vision for the future of Prescott met in the offices of two young lawyers, W. V. Tompkins and M. W. Greeson in the old Nevada County Bank building and organized themselves as a corporation to begin a hardware business. These men were John M. Milburn, A. M. Denman, John M. Pittman, W. B. Waller, J. C. Young, W. J. Binley, W. H. Terry, and Sam Dunn.

At the time they began this venture, Prescott had no paved streets, no water works

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system, no electric lights, no telephone system, and no concrete sidewalks. There were no radios, no motion pictures, no airplanes, and no automobiles. These were the horse and buggy days. Public wells were located in the streets--one on East First Street, another on West First Street, and another on West Second Street. The population of the town was 1290.

The year 1890 seems to be a turning point in the history of Prescott. During that year, Dr. R. L. Powers began the construction of the Prescott and Northwestern Railroad, James T. Brooks erected three storerooms on East Elm street, the Parker House (a hotel) was established by Capt. Sid Parker, J. J. Thomason began publishing *The Prescott Democrat*, and brick buildings were being constructed on the west side of town.

The businessmen mentioned above purchased the stock of A. M. Denman & Bro. and moved it to the two brick storerooms on East Elm erected by W. B. Waller in 1889. In the fall of 1891, the new corporation completed the erection of their new two-room building 57 feet wide on East Elm street and extending back 90 feet adjoining the Waller buildings. A second floor 31 x 90 feet was erected next to the alley. The back 50 feet of the second floor was occupied by the Masonic lodge and the front part was made into the law offices of W. V. Tompkins and M. W. Greeson and the dentist office of Dr. J. M. Powell. A post office was also located in the building.

The only other buildings on this block of East Elm were the law office of Col. C. C. Hamby, the Presbyterian church, the old W. B. White residence, and possibly another residence.

In 1899, just a few years after moving into this building, a disastrous fire destroyed the front part of the building but the warehouse portion was saved. The front part was rebuilt. Two of the sons of J. M. Pittman, Dan and Charlie, joined the firm as salesmen that year.

By 1901, J. M. Pittman had acquired all the stock of the other partners and sold to his sons ten shares each in the business. The new officers were J. M. Pittman, president, Dan Pittman, vice-president, and Charlie Pittman, secretary and treasurer.

Another fire in 1904 which started in the hay barn of the Missouri Pacific railroad destroyed the warehouse and all the residences in the block where the Ozan-Graysonia Lumber retail lumber yards were located. This was one of the most disastrous fires in Prescott's history.

After the fire, property was purchased from W. B. Waller and another warehouse was constructed 60 by 200 feet which joined the main store building. It was planned to be one story, but Charlie Bemis suggested to J. M. Pittman to make it two stories. He took the suggestion and construction began.

In 1909, the corporation surrendered its charter and a partnership was formed between

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Mr. Pittman and his two sons under the name Prescott Hardware Co. Mr. Pittman passed away in 1919 and Dan and Charlie Pittman continued as partners in the business.

In 1927, the Pittmans purchased from W. B. Waller a piece of property 25 by 100 feet and constructed the two-story structure which contained the furniture department.

At the time of the writing of the article in 1934, the Prescott Hardware Co. was the largest retail hardware and furniture store in southwest Arkansas.



**PRESCOTT HARDWARE CO. (OCTOBER 4, 2013)**

I'm sure some of you remember shopping at the Prescott Hardware Co. sometime in your life. Please write and tell us your memories of this store for the next issue.

**Update—*The Nevada County Picayune* reported that the Prescott Hardware Co. building has been sold to a California company for \$2142 in back taxes. The company plans to demolish the building sometime in the next few months.**

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### **RAINFALL RECORD FOR 2013**

Jan.—4.3 inches; Feb. —2.8 inches; Mar.—4.1 inches; Apr.—3.7 inches; May—4.2 inches; June—4.2 inches; July —5.2 inches; Aug. — none; Sep.—5.4 inches; Oct.—7.5 inches; Nov. —6.4 inches; Dec.—8.9 inches---**Total for the year – 56.7 inches**

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## **2013 in the Rearview – Don Mathis**

America may think our news was the worst,  
but tragedies elsewhere were always first.

Paula Deen misspoke regarding race  
and Duck Dynasty star was fired for his views on gays.

But we haven't seen anything yet  
compared to North Korea's missile threat.

We were angry as the trial of George Zimmerman  
as well as Jodi Arias who killed her boyfriend.

The Boston bombers' stunt made us mad  
and the Naval Yard shooter left us sad.

These deaths were senseless but still  
not as tragic as the Nairobi Mall 60 killed.

The economy in Detroit fell through the floor  
but we barely noticed Syria's Civil War.

An Oklahoma tornado left a mess to clean  
but nothing like the typhoon in the Philippines .

We complain Russia doesn't respect gay men  
but glad they gave asylum to Edward Snowden.

We acted all incensed at the Miley Cyrus twerk  
and oohed and awed at the royal birth.

Meanwhile the Asiana jet crashes and we take it in stride.  
Same goes for the victims of the Cleveland kidnapper and his suicide.

Millions celebrated and millions were taken aback  
at the passing of the Affordable Care Act.

At least we didn't have another federal shutdown miscarriage  
when the Supreme Court ruled in defense of gay marriage.

He went from prison to president of South Africa  
and the world grieved the death of Nelson Mandela.

We hold our breath as we all hope  
for positive changes from the new pope.

The era will soon be 2014 in age  
and we remove another calendar page.

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### **2013 Rest In Peace – Don Mathis**

Some leaders of the world have gone to the hereafter,  
such as Hugo Chavez of Venezuela.  
Then there was Margaret Thatcher and Nelson Mandela.

There are country stars we will not see again.  
We'll never see Ray Price's grin,  
cry with George Jones or hear Slim Whitman.

Elmore Leonard's books we would read at night,  
and Tom Clancy's novels would give us a fright.  
But I will miss Seamus Heaney, [the Irish poet and playwright](#)

Rock & Roll went from Annette Funicello on TV  
to the Doors' Ray Manzarek on the organ keys.  
And who can forget the great Lou Reed?

The classic voices could really croon.  
Patti Page and [Patty Andrews](#) could sing a tune.  
And [Eydie Gormé](#) could fly me to the moon.

Roger Ebert kept us informed of film.  
David Frost's insight, I'll really miss him.  
And no more advice from Dear Abigail Van Buren

You know an era has come to an end  
with the death of Jean Stapleton, a great comedian,  
and [Jonathan Winters](#), master of improvisation,

Paul Walker drove 'Fast and Furious,'  
Peter O'Toole had talents prodigious,  
and James Gandolfini made the Sopranos serious.

C. Everett Koop was the nation's health inspector,  
Ed Koch was New York's famous mayor,  
and Bum Phillips was a heck of a football player.

We now have only their memory.  
And we'll have to wait a while to see  
who the movers of the future might be.