

Jerry McKelvy's

SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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[*sandman43@att.net*](mailto:sandman43@att.net)

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Barbara Rushing Lyerly, originally from Chidester, was asked to present a program recently for the Chidester Museum's fifth Sunday program schedule. Her topic was the Bank of Chidester. For those who don't know, Chidester is a small town located between Camden and Bluff City on Hwy. 24. The Rushing family was a prominent family at Chidester for many years. Several of the Rushing family members were associated with the Bank of Chidester which was organized by Barbara's great grandfather, William Nolan Rushing. Barbara's presentation gives a lot of the history of the town of Chidester as well as information about the bank which she accumulated through much research and with the help of many local people and former residents. Thanks to Barbara for sharing this information with me to include in *The Sandyland Chronicle*.

THE BANK OF CHIDESTER (EST. 1909)

In 1880, a new area of settlement was laid out by the Iron Mountain Railroad and T. Jefferson Smith. Mr. Smith had come to this area and acquired land in 1858. He added additional land to the west of his original farm in 1860. During the Civil War Mr. Smith served as a sergeant in Company D of Arkansas' Thirty-third Infantry. After the war, he returned to his farm. Mr. Smith owned the land that would become the population center called Chidester. The Iron Mountain Railroad Co. laid out this new town and constructed a siding track area and a modern depot where people could wait to board passenger trains. Mr. Smith was an ancestor of Willie and Lawrence Webb, and was the premier pioneer of our hometown.

Prior to transportation by rail the area had been served by the Chidester Stage Coach Line, which was owned by Jim Chidester. The town was the first station to change horses on its long run to the west. That station was located out west of town near the big ravine. Mr. Chidester lived in Camden in the home which now houses the Chidester House Museum. The newly planned town chose to use his name as the name of their town. The town was incorporated in February of 1906.

R. H. Holleman opened the first store in Chidester and it stood on the corner of what are now Martin Street and Highway 24. K. A. Martin followed suit when he opened the second store near the same locale. The first post office was in the home of Ben Green, on the corner of what is today Benton Street and Highway 57.

The first school was actually two miles west of town and was built in 1884. Later the school was moved into the town and in 1949 the Reader School was consolidated with Chidester and those students were bussed to Chidester. There were several "wing schools" which were also consolidated with Chidester. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the school at Pleasant Hill was moved into the Chidester Elementary and High Schools.

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The first church established in town was the Methodist Church. It was organized in 1881 by people of the community who needed a church. There were two Methodist Churches at the time, one at Steele's Chapel near today's White Oak Lake and the other at the community of Missouri. Both were a long distance by wagon or horseback. Among the first ministers were John Randolph Rushing and Edward Rushing who were circuit-riding preachers. Edward was an ancestor of Mamie Jo Taylor. Another early minister was Rev. J. W. Whaley. Mr. Smith gave the land for this church. The building was a joint effort between the Methodist congregation, the Masonic Lodge, and the Oddfellows organization. The building was used also as a school for a time. The building still stands behind the current Methodist Church.

The Bethsada Baptist Church was also in the area that T. J. Smith (who was a Baptist) gave to be used for a church and cemetery around 1865. This church was on a part of the grounds of the town's cemetery of today.

A family whose name is very familiar and identified with Chidester for many years moved into town from a plantation near what is today White Oak Lake and began to establish several enterprises that would follow Chidester through many years of history. William N. Rushing established Rushing and Company, a general merchandise store. William Nolan Rushing, his brother, Alice Sidney Rushing, and his son, Warner Eugene Rushing were the owners. Warner Rushing was also a school teacher who "held" several schools over the years including his first at Steele Chapel Church near White Oak Lake. The Chidester Hardware came soon after the Rushing's store and belonged to M. G. McGill. Dr. W. A. Purifoy and James Henry Pickett were also associated with the hardware store.

The town was the hometown of a prominent citizen, Sidney Umsted, the oil prospector who discovered the Smackover oil fields. Chidester also provided a rich source of clay for the Camark Pottery owned by Jack Carnes who was Umsted's son-in-law.

Telephone service came to Chidester in 1906 when William Garland Rushing was granted a franchise for a telephone exchange. Electricity from Ark. Power and Light became a reality in 1928. Work to utilize natural gas within the town was completed in 1955.

Population of the town of Chidester in 1910 was 211 people. The town has never been called a "boom town" showing a growth curve of 280 in 1920; 399 in 1930; 508 in 1940; 425 in 1950; 348 in 1960; 232 in 1970; 342 in 1980; 489 in 1990; 335 in 2000; and 287 in 2010. The jump in the 80's and 90's was probably due to the city limits being extended outward from the original railroad plan of less than a mile square.

The bank of Chidester was established in 1909 by William Nolan Rushing with Joseph S. Pharr as the first president. Dr. W. A. Purifoy, William N.'s son in law, served as vice-president and W. Garland Rushing was cashier. There was much stability in this bank over the years, yet there was turnover in bank directors and employees. Holding steady from 1909 until the takeover of the bank in 1961 was Garland Rushing. From the beginning of the bank there were quite a group of Rushings involved. Beginning with my great grandfather, W. N., his brother and son there were C. B. Clingan and wife, Elizabeth Rushing Clingan, William R. Clingan, John Chester Clingan, Mary Garland Rushing Wylie, Nolan L. Rushing, Nan Emily Rushing Purifoy, Edgar

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Rushing, Beulah Rushing Taylor, Beulah Purifoy Mayne (Dr. Purifoy's daughter), and several relatives in law.

The Bank of Chidester was dedicated to the support of the local economy and to service to the local citizens. There is a steady increase in deposits and investments over the years of Garland Rushing and this bank never closed during the depression, one of only a few small banks in the nation! I have heard it said that in order to qualify for a loan from Garland Rushing one had to have enough money in the bank that he/she would not need a loan!

It would be very boring for me to give you a page-by-page audit of the bank year by year, so I have decided to give you some information in a more conglomerate method. I am listing all bank officers that I have had access to and only showing the years where there were changes. I will do the same with the board of directors, which varies in numbers back and forth over the years. Each of you will be surprised, I think, to see how many of Chidester's citizens were involved in the success of the Bank of Chidester.

The financial data from the bank, for the years I have access to, will also be displayed for you to see, but I will not read you figures for years and years! I know you are pleased about that!

Over the years there were several robberies and hold ups—in more recent years they seemed to happen during deer season! I was not able to get complete information to give you on these robberies due to the fact that I had no specific dates to allow me into the newspaper archives at the Camden News. There is one article I located from the Prescott paper, *The Nevada News*, in February 1953:

“The Bank of Chidester was burgled of over \$1000 in silver and jewelry taken from lock boxes. Entry was gained through the rear door by using a screwdriver. They were unable to open the safe.”

A follow up article in May reported that Samuel Pergason was arrested in Louisiana for the burglary and was sentenced to 18 years in prison. I specifically remember this because my Mother had to go to the trial and identify a diamond ring taken from our lock box. Perry Joe Beaver drove her to Lewisville to the trial. The defendant rose and screamed at her that he would “get her for that” and she was afraid for years afterward!

In the *Camden News* on May 16, 1940 the following appeared in a section called “Local Firms That Have Built Ouachita County:” *The Bank of Chidester, founded in 1909, confines most of its activities to the further advancement of the community in which it is located, its resources primarily devoted to that section. With W. G. Rushing as President, C.B. Clingan and T. H. Benton as Vice-Presidents and W. C. Stinnett as Cashier, it couldn't be different than it is, sound and conservative”.*

In a booklet from 1923 entitled “Businesses, Manufacturers, Merchants, and Tradesmen for Ouachita County” Chidester is listed with several stores, sawmills, and other businesses. The bank is not on the list, but under the town population of 280 it says, “Chidester—A Banking Town”.

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In 1959 the bank hosted an open house to celebrate its fiftieth year in business. The bank was decorated and all officers and employees were on hand to greet the public. Refreshments were catered and there were many people present to help in the celebration. Of course, this was also Garland Rushing's fiftieth year with the bank and so the celebration was double fold. Souvenirs were given to those attending and I managed to find one key chain among my belongings and have attached it to this picture, which I am giving to the museum to be used in this building.

In 1961, Allen Green, of Reader succeeded in his efforts to buy up small investor's stocks until he had a majority of the bank stock. Since this is still a very contentious point for those few Rushings left, I will not delve into the situation. My Uncle Garland was eighty years old and had devoted his life to the bank and to the town's prosperity. He was unceremoniously fired after 52 years of banking. There was much anger on the part of the Rushing family. One should never underestimate a man of this caliber—he opened an insurance office within a few days of his removal from the bank. I must share a humorous story relating to Mr. Green from my cousin Nolan Rushing of Little Rock. During those years he worked for FDIC and called on banks in the state. Neither of us knows if Mr. Green realized who this young man was, but he would almost have had to since he had the same name as his Dad. He said after his visit that the bank president asked him to join him for lunch. He said after he opened his desk drawer and took out an onion, a can of sardines and a pint of whiskey he knew this was seriously his time to make an exit—and he did.

In 1972, the bank was purchased by an attorney from Hope, Arkansas named Talbot Fields. Mr. Fields had no banking experience but bought the bank anticipating that his daughter would be the banker in the family. During the three years under the leadership of Mr. Fields, the bank continued to prosper. In 1975, Mr. Fields made fraudulent loans to two men from Mississippi who used the funds to kite checks that bankrupted the Bank of Chidester. Mr. Fields realized what he had done and he called the Banking Commission himself. The bank was closed on July 2, 1975 and was absorbed by The M and P Bank of Camden, which opened the bank the next day as a part of their holdings.

In later years M and P Bank was acquired by the BankCorp South and the Chidester branch remained open. In May of 2011 BankCorp South closed branch banks in several towns and cities and left three without any banking outlet. One of those towns was Chidester. This maneuver forced citizens of Chidester to drive at least 15 to 20 miles for banking service. Efforts were made by the city officials to stay this move to no avail. After all those years the bank ended with total assets of 2.5 million dollars, FDIC insurance that began in 1934, a landmark of the town and the years of prosperity. It had weathered the Great Depression, five wars, many changes in the national economy and a glorious past--the end of an era for a small bank in a small town in a small state.

Officers and Board Members over the Years

1920—

Officers--Dr. W. A. Purifoy, president; J. A. Diffie, vice-president; W. G. Rushing, cashier

Board Members--Dr. W. A. Purifoy; J. A. Diffie; W. G. Rushing; W. A. Lester; J. R. Riffe; Dr. B. V. Powell; Ira B. Webb

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1921—

Same as above adding Beulah Purifoy as assistant cashier

1922—

Officers—Dr. W. A. Purifoy, president; Dr. B. V. Powell, vice president; W. G. Rushing, cashier; Beulah Purifoy, assistant cashier

Board Members—Ira B. Webb; G. R. Riffe; Dr. W. A. Purifoy; Dr. B. V. Powell; W. G. Rushing

1924—

Officers same as above; T. H. Benton added as board member

1925 - 1926—

same as above

1927—

Officers—T. H. Benton, president; Dr. B. V. Powell, vice-president; W. G. Rushing, cashier; Nolan L. Rushing, assistant cashier

Board Members—T. H. Benton; B. V. Powell; W. G. Rushing

1928—

Officers—T. H. Benton, president; Dr. B. V. Powell; W. G. Rushing, cashier; Nolan L. Rushing, assistant cashier

Board Members—T. H. Benton; Dr. B. V. Powell; W. G. Rushing; D. W. Stott; G. R. Riffe

1929—

Officers—T. H. Benton, president; D. W. Stott, vice-president; W. G. Rushing, cashier; Nolan L. Rushing, assistant cashier

Board Members—same as above plus W. A. Purifoy and Nolan L. Rushing

1930—

Officers—same as above

Board Members—same as above plus W. C. Stinnett

1931—

Officers—same as above plus W. C. Stinnett, assistant cashier; minus Nolan L. Rushing

Board Members—same as above plus Autry Newman; minus Nolan L. Rushing

1932 -1933—

Officers—same as above

Board Members—same as above

1934—

Officers—Dr. W. A. Purifoy, president; D. W. Stott, vice-president; W. G. Rushing, vice—president; W. C. Stinnett, cashier

Board Members—same as above minus Autry Newman

1935—

Officers—same as above

Board Members—same as above plus Autry Newman

1936 - 1938—

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Officers—same as above

Board Members—same as above

1939—

Officers—no president; W. G. Rushing, active vice—president; W. C. Stinnett, cashier

Board Members—W. G. Rushing; W. C. Stinnett; Molly Purifoy; Autry Newman; G. R. Riffe; C. B. Clingan

1940—

Officers—W. G. Rushing, president; C. B. Clingan, vice-president; T. H. Benton, vice president; W. C. Stinnett, cashier

Board Members—same as above plus Beulah Taylor

1941-1942—

Officers—same as above

Board Members—same as above minus G. R. Riffe; J. T. Walker Sr. added

1943—

Officers—same as above plus Nan Purifoy, assistant cashier

Board Members—same as above

1944—

Officers—same as above minus Nan Purifoy

Board Members—same as above

1945—

Officers—same as above plus Lee Aarant, assistant cashier

Board Members—same as above

1946 - 1948—

Officers and Board Members—same as above

1949—

Officers—same as above except W. C. Stinnett (died) and Lee Aarant Purifoy becomes cashier

Board Members—same as above minus Molly Purifoy; Beulah Mayne added

1950—

Officers—same as above plus W. R. Clingan, assistant cashier

Board Members—same as above plus Roy Holleman

1951 - 1952—

Officers and board members same as above

1953—

Officers—same as above minus W. R. Clingan; Mary G. Wylie added as assistant cashier

Board Members—same as above

1954 - 1955

Officers and Board Members same as above

1956—

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Officers—same as above

Board Members—same as above Beulah Mayne; Edgar Rushing added

1957—

Officers and Board Members—same as above

1958—

Officers—same as above minus Lee Purifoy; H. B. Yarbrough added as assistant cashier

Board Members—same as above

1959—

Officers--W. G. Rushing, president; C. B. Clingan, vice-president; Mary G. Wylie, cashier

Board Members—same as above

1960—

Officers—same as above

Board Members—same as above except minus C. B. Cingan; Allen Green added

1961—

Officers—Allen Green, president; Edgar Rushing, vice-president; Ellen Holt, cashier

Board Members—W. G. Rushing; T. H. Benton; Roy Holleman; Beulah Taylor; J. T. Walker Sr.; Dan Cook; Wayne Sanders; Dwade Holleman

1962—

Officers--same as above minus Ellen Holt; added Johnnie Caldwell, cashier and Carolyn Freeman, assistant cashier

Board Members—same as above minus Dan Cook; Raymond Hecker added

1963—

Officers—same as above minus Carolyn Freeman; Kay Humphries added as cashier

Board Members—same as above

1964—

Officers—same as above minus Kay Hunphries; Peggy Nevils added

Board Members—same as above minus Raymond Hecker

1965—

Officers—Allen Green, president; Wayne Sanders, vice-president

Board Members—same as above minus Edgar Rushing

1966—

Officers—same as above minus Peggy Nevils; Mary A. Starnes added

Board Members—same as above

1967—

Officers—Allen Green, president; Mary A. Starnes, cashier

Board Members—same as above

1968—

Officers—same as above; Wayne Sanders added as vice-president

Board Members—same as above plus Allen Green

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1969—

Officers—same as above minus Wayne Sanders

Board Members—same as above

1970—

Officers—Allen Green, president; Mary A. Starnes, cashier; Vivian Purifoy and Alpha O’Rear, secretaries

Board Members—same as above plus C. C. Walthall

1971—

Officers—Allen Green, president; Mary A. Starnes, cashier

Board Members—same as above

1972—

Officers—Talbor Fields, president; Alpha O’Rear, cashier; Cathy Fields, assistant cashier

Board Members—Dwade Holleman; Wayne Sanders; C. C. Walthall; Anna C. Fields; Talbot Fields Jr.

1973—

Officers—same as above

Board Members—same as above minus Anna C. Fields and Talbot Fields Jr.

1974—

Officers—same as above minus Cathy Fields; Margaret Pickett added

Board Members—Talbot Fields; Alpha Hunter; Wayne Sanders; Dwade Holleman; C. C. Walthall

1975—

The officers remained the same. This was the year that the bank was closed due to fraudulent loans that caused the bank to fail. The bank closed one day as the Bank of Chidester and opened the next as a part of the M and P Bank of Camden. It was never the same.

SARAH

By Jerry McKelvy

The year 1977 found me working for a large timber company as a forest technician. That job involved both office and field work. By field work, I mean working in the woods cruising timber, checking timber sales, working with contractors in harvesting and replanting forests, doing forest inventory, and many other jobs. The work was not boring since we covered several counties and did many different type jobs.

It was about that time that many women became interested in forestry as a career--a field previously considered men's work. One day it was announced we would be getting a female forester to work out of our office and guess what? I was the one picked to show her around our part of the world. I was 34 years old at the time, a little older than the other technicians in our office. Maybe that's why I was chosen to work with her at first.

Sarah was originally from Pennsylvania. She was single, in her mid-20s, and had recently completed her studies to be a forester. She had worked a short time at another office before

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being transferred to our office. Female foresters were pretty rare in those days. It looked good for the company to be able to say they had a diverse work force including women and minorities.

Working with members of the opposite sex in an office situation or on an assembly line is one thing, but having to spend eight hours alone in the woods with them is completely different. All of the men in our office were married and we all had reservations about having to work with Sarah, but what choice did we have? We wondered how our wives would feel about it. Whenever we stopped at a store for some reason, I made sure that everyone could see the company logo on the truck I was driving. I didn't want any rumors getting started that I was driving around with a woman who was not my wife.

I don't mind telling you that I was a bit nervous the first day I had to work with Sarah in the woods. Sarah was probably nervous also, but she was the one who chose forestry as a profession and should have known what to expect. Working with a female required some minor adjustments in some situations. I usually changed into my work clothes when I got to the woods, but when I worked with Sarah I just wore the same clothes all day to avoid having to change. Of course, the biggest problem was what to do when nature called. On those occasions, Sarah went one way and I went the other.

Sarah had a problem with her vision and wore very thick glasses. Most foresters and technicians had their own company pickup trucks to use at work. One time Sarah and I met at a certain location on a county road. We decided to leave my truck on the county road and drive into the tract of land in her truck. The land we were looking at was about a mile off the road and was accessed by a narrow logging road. It was sandy land and the woods road was in pretty good shape. I was sitting in the passenger seat looking out the window as she drove. When I looked back toward the front of the vehicle, I noticed that we were completely out of the logging road and were headed for a clump of bushes which I suspected had grown up from a tree stump. Before I could say anything we hit the stump with a tremendous jolt. When we got stopped the truck was sitting on top of a large stump and we could not move. I asked Sarah why she was off the road and she said she was trying to avoid a dead limb lying in the road. We ended up having to call the office and they sent our fire plow (a small dozer) out to get her truck off the stump. I know it was embarrassing for Sarah. If I had been looking ahead I could have warned her in time about the stump.

It was not long after that episode that the company decided to let Sarah use her own vehicle at work and paid her mileage instead of using a company truck. For the rest of her time with us, she drove an older model Plymouth Valiant car at work which meant she could not get off the main roads. She rode with someone else in their truck on jobs requiring travel on logging roads.

Sarah also had some kind of sleep problem. I have seen her go to sleep at her desk while using a calculator. Just about anytime we left the office to drive to our work, she would be asleep within two or three minutes. I remember one time Sarah was working with me and another fellow. We left the office with the other fellow driving, Sarah in the middle, and me in the passenger seat. We had barely got out of town when Sarah fell asleep with her head nodding. When we turned a curve to the left, Sarah fell over onto my shoulder and when we turned to the right, she fell on the other fellow's shoulder. Sometimes she slumped forward. I have never worked with anyone

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who had such a sleep problem. I think that was one reason the company took her truck away from her. I wondered how she could drive her own car without falling asleep.

Sarah belonged to the Baha'i religious organization that required her to fast from sunrise to sunset for nineteen days in March of each year. It was uncomfortable for me to eat my lunch in the woods with Sarah while she just sat there and ate nothing. Working without eating or drinking water on a hot day can be dangerous. I asked her about that and she told me that she could take a drink of water if she felt it was medically necessary. It's a good thing her fast was in March because later on in the summer it would be very dangerous to work without eating or drinking water. Sarah also believed it was wrong to kill any living thing including snakes, ticks, or mosquitoes which were common in the woods of south Arkansas.

Sarah was only with us for about a year or so. I don't know the circumstances of her departure or if she continued her work as a forester. Over the next few years we had several more female forest technicians and foresters working with us and we learned to make whatever adjustments that were necessary to work together to get the job done. There was no question that the females could do the work as well as the males. The number of females going into forestry seemed to decline after a few years, but I will never forget my experiences almost forty years ago with Sarah, the first female forester in our office.

PICTURE CONTEST



First Place Winner

William Hezikiah and Mary C. Barlow



Second Place Winner

Benjamin Franklin Green and wife, Conella Green and children

RAINFALL FOR JANUARY --- 5.4 inches

WEATHER TRIVIA--

December, 1929--El Dorado, Arkansas received 17 inches of snow. It snowed continuously for 18 hours. Transportation was brought to a standstill. This was the largest snowfall since 1876 when 24 inches of snow fell across southern Arkansas. (*The Nevada News*—Dec. 26, 1929)

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CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS SCHOOL?

This old school photo belonged to a member of the Westmoreland family, It was thought to be the Westmoreland School which was in Nevada County north of Morris (Caney), but another picture shows a different building, so now there is some doubt as to which school this is.

This building could have replaced an earlier building. If you recognize the school, the teacher, or any of the students, let me know and I'll pass the information along to the Westmoreland family.

SCRAPPEL (A MOST PALATABLE DISH) (from a 1927 cook book)

Take the head, heart, and any lean scraps of pork and boil until the flesh slips easily from the bones; remove the fat, gristle, and bones, then chop fine. Set the liquor in which the meat boiled aside until cold, take the cake of fat from the surface and return to the fire, when it boils put in the chopped meat and season with salt and pepper well, let it boil again, then thicken with corn meal as you would in ordinary mush by letting it slip through the fingers slowly to prevent lumps, cook an hour, stirring constantly at first, afterwards putting back in the range in a position to boil gently. When done pour into a long, square pan, not too deep, and mould. In cold weather this can be kept several weeks. Cut into slices when cold and fry brown as you would mush. A cheap and delicate breakfast dish.